PATTERNS OF POWER · AFSHARID IRAN

AFSHARID IRAN

The eleven years of Nadir Shah: a conqueror who could take anything and convey nothing, and the difference between holding a thing and owning it

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with Claude (Anthropic) · 2026

held as tested, not revealed

The collaboration

This is a case study in the *Patterns of Power* series, applying the series' framework to Afsharid Iran, from the destruction of the Safavid state in 1722 and the rise of a Khorasani herdsman's son who reassembled the country, to his assassination in June 1747 and the dissolution of everything he had built. The framework is a lens for reading how any order of power is founded, dressed, and held: the floor of force beneath every order, the robe of doctrine laid over the floor to make the force cheap, the settlement that divides the spoils, the cost column in which each subject prices defection, the seam that manages the belief on which the whole depends, the default by which an elite coordinates without instruction, and — running through all of it — position logic, the proposition that rulers in like positions converge on like solutions because a position poses a problem with only a few good answers.

Afsharid Iran was chosen because it isolates the variable the series had been asking about in a single question: *is there a seat in the conquered order, and can a stranger sit down?* Every earlier study met that question with the two halves of it fused. Northern Nigeria supplied a working apparatus and a licence to run it in one motion; Kenya supplied neither. Iran in 1726 pulled them apart, and pulled them apart in the harder direction. The apparatus had been destroyed — the registers scattered, the provincial administration dead or dispersed, the capital held by a few thousand Afghans, the west and the Caucasus partitioned between two empires by a treaty they were candid enough to call the Partition of Persia. What had *not* been destroyed was the Safavid claim itself, which went on paying long after the state that issued it had been eaten: pretenders sprouted in every province, both great powers preferred to negotiate with a penniless fugitive of the blood rather than with the man who held Isfahan, and the strongest soldier in Asia spent a decade calling himself *Tahmasp Qoli* — slave of Tahmasp. That combination is worse than losing both halves, because it offers a cheap non-solution: a warrant that cannot be bought can still be rented, and renting works immediately, costs nothing, and postpones the problem until there is no time left.

Everything else in this study follows from that. A conqueror who cannot convey title cannot make owners; a man who cannot make owners cannot bind an elite, cannot fund a formation, cannot be checked by anybody, cannot regulate his own extraction, cannot re-balance his own coalition, and cannot be succeeded. Six failures that are not six variables but one variable observed six times.

The study was built the way the series is built, one module at a time. The author brought the framework, the direction, and the judgement of the whole, and held the

collaboration to its disciplines; Claude, Anthropic's model, did the research — verifying every load-bearing quotation, date, and figure by search against a source reproducing the primary text before any module was written — and produced the drafts, applying the framework module by module, each presented and confirmed before the next was begun. The framework's concepts are the series'; the Afsharid application, and the refinements it yielded, are the work of the collaboration.

Its engine throughout is the method of information asymmetry, adapted to an order with no metropole. There is no imperial capital here to be kept ignorant of what the frontier is doing. The gap this study works in runs instead between what a court secretary wrote inside the tent and what the same document lets slip against its own interest; between the proclamation Nadir sent to the ulama of Isfahan, which does not mention the Safavids at all, and the letters he sent abroad, which do; and between a *mullah* whipped to death for a couplet on a wall at Mashhad and a Dutch Company narrative of the Indian campaign, published in Holland and translated into three languages within two years, that he never made the slightest attempt to stop. The study sets the exact words beside the exact words, lays out the arithmetic, and leaves the sum to the reader. It does not preach the conclusion.

The disciplines

Five rules govern every module.

Quotation. Public-domain primary sources — the anonymous Venetian merchant's narrative of 1507–10 in Grey's 1873 translation, Krusinski's memoirs of the siege of Isfahan, Astarabadi's official history in Jones's 1773 English abridgement, Hanway's account of 1753, Malcolm's *History of Persia* of 1815 reproducing the testimony of Nadir's own physician — are quoted exactly, at the length the argument needs, because in a legal fiction and in an official chronicle alike the precise wording *is* the evidence. Modern copyrighted scholarship is paraphrased, briefly, and credited; where a primary text reaches the reader only through a modern edition or translation, it is described rather than quoted, and that is said.

No fabrication. No quotation, date, attribution, or figure is ever invented or reconstructed from memory. What cannot be verified is dropped or flagged, never guessed. This case required that rule more often than most: the phrase preserved in the tradition about the conspirators resolving to breakfast off Nadir before he supped off them could not be traced to a primary text, and is presented as a report rather than a quotation; the population of eighteenth-century Iran cannot be established, and no figure for it is supplied; the toll of the siege of Isfahan, the numbers at Gulnabad and Karnal, the dead at Delhi, the losses in Daghestan and the number blinded in the last years are all given as ranges with their provenance stated, and in the last case in the sceptical framing of the contemporary who reported it.

Gravity without partisanship. Suffering is held with gravity, and the study refuses both flattery and demonisation. Its recurring watchword is *legibility is not pardon*: to reconstruct an army in detail is not to admire it, and to explain why a ruler's choices were rational from inside his own position is not to approve of them. A conquest that was genuinely once a conquest is named as one — and naming a conquered origin is not debunking, since a built thing that became real is more durable than a lie, not less.

Contribution. Every module returns a refinement to the framework, stated plainly in its closing section, rather than merely applying the framework to the case. Where a module confirms an earlier finding rather than producing a new one, it says so, and the findings are allowed to compound rather than being reset each time.

Held as tested, not revealed. The pattern is treated as something discovered and tested against the evidence, not handed down as doctrine — a lens laid over the record, a tendency and never a law.

What Afsharid Iran added to the framework

Because this is the collection's clearest case of a conquest that had everything except a title, it was able to name mechanisms the settled orders obscure. Chief among the refinements the study contributed: that the question *is there a seat* is doing the work of two, and that an **instrument** a stranger can capture and a **warrant** a population already honours come apart, with the surviving-warrant case being the worse of the two because it makes renting available; that where the warrant is vested in a *bloodline* rather than an office or an institution, both cheap provenances close at once and only forging remains; that forging is not merely expensive but structurally impossible where the party who must honour the new currency is a rival sovereign whose own legitimacy consists in refusing it, so that no quantity of force can obtain what only concession can confer; that a settlement's characteristic technology can be run *backwards*, converting things into flows — inalienable endowment into a revenue line, assignment into salary, owners into employees; that a ruler who cannot own rationally declines to make owners, since grants made on a contested warrant endow rivals rather than defenders; that formation requires an endowment and an endowment is a settlement with the interpreter class, so **a ruler who cannot make owners cannot make believers**; that liberty is lodged rather than granted, and a concession lodged in the granter's goodwill leaves no residue whatever, however large, while one lodged in an institution with its own warrant outlives him however narrow; that divide-and-balance is stable only where the things balanced are institutions rather than favours, since balancing favours makes every reallocation a survival question and forfeits the ruler's own ability to re-balance; that what a settlement requires is not that positions be heritable but that they be *institutional*; that an exit-control apparatus is a dated symptom of an extraction rate having crossed its threshold, and is a more sensitive instrument than a rebellion; that the "just enough" equilibrium is a property of the settlement rather than of the extractor, since an order can only tune its rate through people who lose by the tuning being wrong; that a floor can **exhaust itself by winning**, where the running cost of an undefeated instrument exceeds what the territory yields; that fracture in an order without a settlement produces *dissolution* rather than revolution, because the men who fracture the apex are saving their lives rather than defending holdings and have nothing to install; that the metabolic note can be called as a permanent step rather than a mortality spike, where the carrying capacity

rests on infrastructure maintained by the cultivating population itself, so that removing the people *is* destroying the works; that where an order is too short-lived for its violence to be naturalised, the violence is *partitioned* instead, and a diagnosis outperforms amnesia because it survives the evidence; and that the price of a warrant is the risk of not receiving it.

The arc

A landscape opening and twelve modules, each with a framework function and its own evocative title.

Landscape — the order Nadir found. **The Space Between the Trunk and the Branches.** A Sufi brotherhood that took Iran in 1501 and was worshipped as a god by its own cavalry, naturalised over two centuries into a Twelver clerical establishment resting on an unprovable descent from the Seventh Imam — and the three years, 1722 to 1725, in which a few thousand Afghans and two treaty-making empires destroyed its state without touching its claim.

1 — The Floor of Force. **A Column of Fire.** Twelve hundred raiders at Kalat become the largest army on earth in fifteen years, by absorbing the men it defeats and paying them from the treasuries it takes: a floor that is not a monopoly of violence but a dominant market share in it, held by outbidding, and therefore never able to stand still.

2 — The Settlement. **Paid in His Own Coin.** A cadastral survey, the confiscation of the inalienable endowments into the *raqabat-e Naderi*, the suspension of the pious foundations and fixed cash salaries in place of land tenure: not an empty page but a policy, and the reason a man with no warrant cannot afford to create owners.

3 — The Robe. **The Servant of the Eight and Four.** A conventional Twelver seal in 1732 and the abolition of its formula in 1736; the Ja'fari *madhhab* reconstructed audience by audience; and eleven dated years spent pursuing a pillar at the Ka'ba that only the sultan in Istanbul could grant and only his own legitimacy forbade him to.

4 — Formation. **The School With No Schools.** Ismail's programme run with its constructive half deleted — the incumbent killed, the practices banned, and then the madrasas defunded — and a translation project in which the sacred text was submitted to research: a founder of a school of law who never touched a single child.

5 — The Cost Column. **The Freedom of Egress.** Villages retiring into the mountains, flight into Mughal India, Ottoman territory, Arabia and across the Gulf — and the dated order to the road-post keepers to examine passports, from a reign that for a decade had not needed one.

6 — Extraction. **Twelve Months Pay for a Hundred and Forty Thousand Men.** A wage bill running at several times the whole revenue of the richest Iranian state of the previous century; a cash demand that becomes a forced sale to the assessor; and a rate that behaves as a step function because only a foreign conquest could lower it.

7 — Information and Suppression. **After the Caucasus.** A court secretary who concealed nothing and diagnosed instead, drawing a line through the reign that has

organised the record for two hundred and fifty years; an unofficial chronicler who wrote down what a strangled cleric had said; and a European channel out of the country that was never closed because it could not hurt him.

8 — Elite Coordination and the Default. **They Took Advantage of Their Stations.** The corpus's first full case of divide-and-balance, run to destruction; a physician's testimony that the shah told one contingent it would arrest the other in the morning; and fifteen men whose only holding was access to his tent.

9 — Plurality or Foreclosure. **One of the Shah's Royal Seals.** The largest package of liberties in Iran, tested successfully against a state official in 1683 and worth nothing in 1740; a protection reissued because it kept lapsing; and two Georgian crowns that survived because their warrant was never Nadir's to give.

10 — Change and Collapse. **Time Will Discover.** Half a dozen provinces in revolt and every rising crushed; then fracture, and an empire from Bahrain to Bukhara that did not change hands but stopped existing — and the deported tribes who simply walked home.

11 — The Grim Accounting. **Not of Money Only.** Two ledgers: what the sword did, stated in ranges and refused a total; and the metabolic note called as a permanent step rather than a spike, in silted channels, deserted villages, a country going back to pasture, and a city that took two centuries to return to where it had been.

12 — Convergence and Divergence. **Nine Days of Silence.** The control case standing in the next tent; three answers to one problem in one country in one century, whose durations line up in the predicted order; and the strongest case for Nadir Shah, stated in full and answered without flinching.

THE SPACE BETWEEN THE TRUNK AND THE BRANCHES

Landscape · The order Nadir found — a conquest that had become the country, the state of that conquest broken in three years, and the one thing the breakage left standing: a warrant of descent that no soldier could seize

A god at Tabriz

In the summer of 1501 a boy of fourteen rode into Tabriz at the head of a few thousand Turkmen cavalry in red caps and had himself proclaimed shah, and then did the thing that made the difference: he ordered the Friday sermon recited in the name of Ali and the Imams of his line, and made Twelver Shi'ism the religion of the state in a country that had been Sunni since the Arab conquests eight and a half centuries before. He was Ismail, eighth shaykh of a Sufi order founded at Ardabil by Safi al-Din, a Sunni holy man dead since 1334, whose descendants had over four generations converted a devotional brotherhood into a militia and then into an army. The men who put him on the throne were the *qizilbash*, the red-heads, Turkmen tribesmen from Anatolia and Azerbaijan who wore a scarlet cap of twelve folds for the twelve Imams and who followed him not as a king but as something considerably more.

We have an eyewitness to what that something was, and because the eyewitness was a Venetian merchant with no doctrinal stake and a long stay — he was in Persia for eight years and eight months, was with Ismail's army at Arzinjan in 1507, and knew Persian, Turkish and Arabic — his testimony can be set down as he gave it. Of the shah's return to Tabriz he wrote, in the translation the Hakluyt Society published in 1873:

> *"This Sophy is loved and reverenced by his people as a god, and especially by his soldiers, many of whom enter into battle without armour, expecting their master Ismael to watch over them in the fight... The name of God is forgotten throughout Persia and only that of Ismael remembered... besides this, everyone, and particularly his soldiers, consider him immortal, but I have heard that Ismael is not pleased with being called a god or a prophet."*

That is the founding of the Safavid order caught at its most expensive point, before anything had settled: a floor of force held up by the personal, millenarian devotion of

the men who worked it, a devotion so hot that soldiers went into the line unarmoured. It was also, at that moment, a conquest of the ordinary kind, and it converted the country by the ordinary means. Sunni ulama who would not recant were killed, exiled, or made to recant; the names of the first three caliphs were struck out of the sermon; and public cursing of Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman — *tabarra* — was imposed as a spoken oath of submission, enforced in some periods by a licensed body of cursers who reported those who kept Sunni observance in private. Refusal could cost a man his life. The population of Tabriz itself was reportedly Sunni by a substantial majority when the proclamation was made. None of this is contested; it is the standard account, and it is worth stating plainly at the outset for one reason only, which is that a reader who begins two centuries later will find no trace of it in the world he is looking at.

Two centuries, and the god becomes a genealogy

By 1700 the order had reached the far, cheap end of the gradient. It had not merely won; it had become the furniture. Iran was a Shi'i country in the way that a language is a language — not held as a proposition anyone had been argued into, but as the plain shape of the world: the calendar, the mourning of Ashura, the shrines at Mashhad and Qom, the law of marriage and inheritance, the vocabulary of a man's own name. Nadir's father was called Emam Qoli, *slave of the Imam*; Nadir himself was Nadr Qoli; he would name his eldest son Reza Qoli after the Eighth Imam, whose shrine at Mashhad lay a few days' ride from the tents he was born in. The naming is not evidence of piety. It is evidence of something more useful to the analyst: that the categories of the conquest of 1501 had sunk so far into ordinary life that a poor Turkmen herdsman in the mountains north of Mashhad used them to name his children without any sense of using them at all.

The instrument that drove it that deep was, as it usually is, a class of trained interpreters and the institutions that paid them. Ismail's own qizilbash could supply devotion but not jurisprudence; the Twelver legal tradition in Iran had been a minority science, and the state that had just made it official needed men who could actually run it. So the early Safavids recruited Arab Shi'i jurists — Ali al-Karaki, who joined the court around 1508 and was made shaykh al-Islam at Tabriz, is the emblematic figure — and the standard account has a migration of scholars from Jabal Amil in what is now Lebanon and from Bahrayn into Iranian posts and Iranian madrasas. (Andrew Newman has argued that the scale of that migration has been overdrawn and that some of the imported jurists opposed al-Karaki's accommodation with the throne; the argument matters, and the honest statement is that the transmission happened and its demography is disputed.) Around them the state built offices and endowed them: the

sadr, administrator of the religious endowments and chief officer of the religious courts, an office the Safavids inherited from Sunni Iranian practice and later split in two; the *shaykh al-Islam* of each major city; and, in the last years of Sultan Husayn's reign, a new office at the summit of the whole clerical establishment, the *mullabashi*, appointed by the shah and holding at his pleasure. Under Abbas I the endowment machinery was worked hard in both directions at once, the shah endowing the new centre of Isfahan as *waqf* and thereby appearing pious and paying less tax in the same motion. By the end of the seventeenth century that establishment held shrine lands, madrasas, courts, the schooling of the literate, and the interpretation of the law of everyday life — a genuine institutional interest with its own revenues, sitting alongside the throne rather than inside it.

And as the clerical order grew, the millenarian one shrank. The shah who in 1507 was worshipped as a god by unarmoured cavalry had become, by 1700, a mostly palace-bound monarch whose claim rested on two much cooler things: that he was the patron and protector of the true faith, and that he was of the blood. Abbas I had already turned the state's coercive weight against Sufi enthusiasms he could not control, massacring the Nuqtavis; the qizilbash tribes had been deliberately diluted a century earlier by a corps of Caucasian slave-soldiers loyal to the crown alone. The heat had gone out of the claim. What was left in its place, and what everything now hung from, was a line of descent.

"Too great a space between the trunk and the branches"

The line was this. The Safavids claimed descent from Musa al-Kazim, the Seventh Imam, and thereby from Ali and from the Prophet's daughter; Ismail later added, for good measure, a Sasanian pedigree. It is the oldest move in the repertoire and it is not a Persian speciality — the Fatimids of Egypt had built one like it five centuries earlier — and its function is exact: it converts a family into an office that only that family can hold.

That the genealogy was a fabrication was not a secret discovered by modern scholarship. It was visible to an attentive foreigner living in Isfahan at the time. Father Judasz Tadeusz Krusiński, a Polish Jesuit who lived in Iran from 1707, acted as an interpreter at the Safavid court, and was in the capital through the siege that destroyed it, set out the dynasty's claim and then, in the same paragraph, refused it:

> *"ONE of the most famous of the Twelve was MUSA CAIM... from whom, after a long Series of Generations, they pretend to derive Sophy, the first of the Family of this Name, that we know any Thing of. Whether he came from MUSA CAIM,*

or no; for this Descent is not at all proved, and there is too great a Space between the Trunk and the Branches, for us to be sure of any Thing in this respect..."

Too great a space between the trunk and the branches. It is the right sentence and it is worth holding, because the interesting thing about it is how little it mattered. Krusinski was not the only man in Isfahan capable of arithmetic. The gap in the pedigree was, in principle, available to anyone who cared to count generations; the Ottoman religious establishment across the frontier had every incentive to publish the count and did not lack scholars to do it. And none of that made the slightest difference to what the descent could buy inside Iran, because a currency of legitimacy is not a proposition that has to survive audit. It is a thing an audience honours. Two hundred years of formation had made this particular one the only coin in circulation in Iran, and the test of that is not what anyone said about it but what men did when it was the only thing left.

There is a second image from the Venetian merchant that catches the distinction the whole of this study will turn on. Sent to Tabriz with a decree in his favour, he noted who had sealed it and how the seal travelled:

"The decree was written in Ismael's name in large letters, and sealed with his seal... by the hands of Mirbec, the ruler of Mosul, who wears the seal of Ismael on a chain round his neck; it is made out of a diamond set in a beautifully worked ring of gold... and is engraved in minute letters with the name of Ismael surrounding the twelve sacraments of their sect."

The seal is portable. A subordinate seven hundred miles from the court carries it on a chain and makes decrees binding with it, and they are binding, and they stay binding. But what makes them binding is not the diamond; it is the name engraved around the twelve. The instrument can be handed to a man on a chain. The warrant cannot.

Where the conquest never took

One qualification, and it is the one that killed the dynasty. The Safavid belief was thick at the core and thin, or absent, at the edges — and the edges were Sunni. The Ghilzai and Abdali Pashtuns around Kandahar and Herat, Kurds in the west, Baluch in the south-east, Daghestani Lezgins in the north, Uzbeks over the Oxus: none of these had been folded into the belief that held the Persian-speaking and Turkic core, and several of them had been given active reason to resent it. Under Sultan Husayn the pressure on Sunni observance in the peripheries increased, and the standard account of the Ghilzai revolt puts religious grievance among its proximate causes. In 1709 Mirwais

Hotak, a Ghilzai notable at Kandahar, killed the shah's governor there — Gurgin Khan, the Georgian George XI of Kartli — and made the province independent. Punitive expeditions failed. Herat went the same way under the Abdalis. The Safavid army, starved of money and attention across two generations of palace government, could not retake either.

This is the ordinary asymmetry of a naturalised order, and it deserves to be named without either sentiment or sneering. Toward its own core the Safavid state ran cheaply, on conviction, with the sword far in the background. Toward its Sunni periphery it ran on force it had allowed to rot. The order was authentically the world of the Isfahani townsman and the Khorasani peasant; it was an imposition on the Kandahari, and he knew it, and when the force went, so did he.

Three weeks in March

What followed is one of the most disproportionate results in the record. In 1721 Mahmud, Mirwais's son, marched west out of Kandahar with a force variously given as ten to twenty thousand men, mostly cavalry, with camel-mounted swivel guns and no siege train worth the name. Isfahan sent out an army against him at Gulnabad on 8 March 1722 that contemporary and modern estimates put at forty to fifty thousand — better dressed, better armed, with two dozen cannon, and by every account of the day a parade rather than an instrument. It broke in a morning. Safavid dead are given as five to fifteen thousand; Afghan losses were slight.

Mahmud could not storm the capital, so he sat down around it, and this is the point at which the arithmetic becomes plain: a state that had ruled from the Oxus to the Euphrates for two hundred and twenty years was blockaded in its own capital by a raiding force smaller than the garrison it had lost. On the night of 16–17 March the Armenian suburb of New Julfa, whose inhabitants had been largely disarmed by the Persian authorities beforehand, was stormed after hours of resistance by a few hundred townsmen. Relief efforts failed or never came. The Georgian vassal did not march. And the siege settled into the only weapon Mahmud actually had.

Bread at fifty shillings a pound

Krusinski was inside the city. What he recorded is a metabolic collapse in a place that a generation earlier had been one of the largest cities on earth — estimates of Isfahan's population before the fall range from two hundred thousand to half a million, with Chardin holding at the end of the seventeenth century that it nearly equalled London

— and swollen further by refugees from the surrounding countryside. His account runs, in the English of the 1733 translation:

> *"Corn failing in September, a Pound of Bread was sold for thirty Shillings, and in October for above fifty... Part of them was fell'd in the Famine Time, and the Leaves and Bark sold by the Pound. The Roots of Herbs made into Meal were eaten. Shoe-Leather being boil'd was for a time the common Food; at last they came to eat human Flesh, and the Streets being full of Carcasses, some had their Thighs cut off privately."*

The city's trees, which the traveller Tavernier had said made it look more a forest than a town, were cut down and their bark weighed out for sale. Cannibalism was punished with the bastinado and continued anyway. Krusinski records mothers who killed and ate their own children, and then the detail that does more work than any of the horrors preceding it, because it is about habituation rather than extremity — the dead were thrown into the streets

> *"in so great Numbers, that there was no going without passing over them, to which People at last accustom'd themselves."*

They were tipped afterwards into the Zayandeh Rud in such quantity that the river was undrinkable for a year. On the toll, Krusinski is scrupulous in a way that should be copied rather than tidied: he says he read letters from the Armenians of Julfa giving a figure so high that, though he had been on the spot himself, he dared neither affirm nor deny it; he notes that fewer than twenty thousand had died by the sword; and he observes that fewer than a hundred thousand souls were left in the place when it was taken. Modern accounts commonly give something on the order of eighty thousand dead in the siege, and the honest form is a range from about eighty thousand upward, with the upper bound unfixed and the number owed entirely to hunger.

The horses they had to send

On 22 October 1722 the shah sent plenipotentiaries to the Afghan camp and the articles were signed the same day. What happened on the 23rd is the founding scene of everything that follows, and Krusinski gives it in detail because he understood what he was watching.

The Afghans had to send horses for the king and his officers, *"there being not one left in Ispahan, where all were eaten during the Famine."* The city had been prepared for the ceremony and made no sound as he rode through it: *"A sullen, doleful Silence express'd*

more Sorrow; and was more moving than their loud Laments." At the camp Mahmud, who had refused to ride out and meet him, would hardly rise. And then:

> *"Schah-Huffein, on the contrary, no sooner saw him, than he ran to him with open Arms, and after having embrac'd him, and kifs'd him with great Tokens of Friendship, he took his Crown out of his Bosom, and put it on his Head, declaring him, in Presence of the Grandees of both Nations, his Successor to the Throne, to the Exclusion of his own Children and their Posterity."*

He then delivered *"a Writing sign'd by himself and all his Ministers, which transferr'd the Sovereignity to him and his Family,"* asked to be treated thereafter as a father, and — the most poignant line in the account, from a man who had just presided over the destruction of his house — recommended to his conqueror the good government of the kingdom, the exact distribution of justice, *"not to overburthen the People with extraordinary Taxes, and to content himself with what they had been accustom'd to pay."* Afterwards the Afghan mufti pronounced over the two kneeling men *"a set Form of Curses and Execrations"* against whichever of them broke the articles.

Look at the form of this and not the pathos of it. A victorious warlord who held the capital, the treasury, the person of the king and the only army in the field nevertheless required the defeated man to hand him the crown with his own hands, to declare him successor in front of the notables of both nations, to sign a written instrument of conveyance countersigned by his ministers, and to have a cleric seal it with an oath. Mahmud had possession from the moment the gates opened. He staged all of this because possession was not the thing he wanted, and he knew it. He wanted title, and he was trying to buy it from the only man who had any to sell. He went further in the same direction: he married a daughter of the deposed shah, which is the same manoeuvre by another route.

It did not work. Within three years he had massacred the Safavid princes he was holding, and he died mad in April 1725; his cousin Ashraf succeeded him and had Sultan Husayn himself put to death (1726 in some accounts, 1727 in others). The Afghans held Isfahan for seven years and never held Iran, and the reason is legible in the ceremony of 23 October: the transfer was performed with every formality the parties could think of, and it conveyed nothing, because what Sultan Husayn possessed that Mahmud wanted was not in his gift. The crown was in his bosom and he could hand it over. The descent from Musa al-Kazim was in his blood and he could not.

The partition

The neighbours read the situation correctly and moved. Peter the Great came down the western shore of the Caspian in 1722–23, and by the Treaty of St Petersburg of September 1723 Russia took Derbent, Baku and the lands of Shirvan around it, and the provinces of Gilan, Mazandaran and Astarabad. The Ottomans came in from the west and took Georgia, Armenia, Tabriz, Ardabil, Hamadan and Kermanshah. In June 1724 the two of them signed at Constantinople the treaty that Ottoman usage called, without embarrassment, the Partition of Persia, drawing the line between their shares — and adding the clause that tells you what the country had become in the eyes of the powers around it: that if the Safavid claimant Tahmasp II would not accept the arrangement, Russia and the Porte would act together against him and install a ruler of their choosing.

So by the middle of the 1720s the situation on the ground was this. The capital and the centre were held by a few thousand Afghans. The north and the Caspian provinces were Russian. The whole west and the Caucasus were Ottoman. Herat was Abdali. Khorasan was in the hands of local strongmen. And the state — the tax registers, the provincial administration, the standing regiments, the treasury, the network of governors and their reporting lines — was simply gone, not captured but dispersed, its records scattered and its personnel dead, fled or hired locally by whoever now held the district they lived in.

The branches that kept sprouting

And here is the finding that the rest of this study is built on, because it is the one thing the destruction did not touch.

The Safavid warrant went on paying after the Safavid state had ceased to exist. Sultan Husayn's son Tahmasp escaped the siege with a few hundred men, was proclaimed shah at Qazvin on 10 November 1722, and spent the following decade as a fugitive with no army, no treasury and no capital — and both of the great powers dismembering his country preferred to negotiate with him rather than with the Afghan who actually held Isfahan. Pretenders appeared across Iran, and kept appearing for decades. Sayyid Ahmad Marashi, of a Safavid-connected line, crowned himself in Kerman in November 1726. A dervish from Rafsanjan claiming to be Safi Mirza, a son of the last shah, was taken up by the Ottomans, given refuge in Istanbul in 1729, styled Shah Safi II, encouraged to rise, and — when he proved useless — sent to die on Rhodes.

Even the men who were plainly warlords reached for a pedigree the moment they held ground. Malek Mahmud Sistani, a courtier who came to terms with the Afghans in exchange for a free hand in the east, took Mashhad and made himself its ruler; his family claimed descent from Ya'qub b. Layth, founder of the ninth-century Saffarid dynasty, and through him from the Sasanian kings. He did the two things a man does when he means to be sovereign: he claimed a line, and he struck coin. The silver he struck it from he took out of the shrine of the Eighth Imam, whose gold and silver reserves a Safavid commander had already once confiscated to pay for a failed campaign against Herat. The shrine of the Imam was stripped twice in a decade to buy soldiers, once by the dynasty that had made the shrine the centre of the national cult and once by the man who displaced it.

Nobody in this landscape thinks that holding a province is the same as ruling one. Every single claimant behaves as though a name is required, and hunts for one, and pays for one.

What a man in Khorasan could see from where he stood

Into that field, in the north-eastern corner of it, comes a man whose position must be reconstructed before any of his choices will read.

Nadr Qoli was born in the mountains north of Mashhad, in November 1688 by the reckoning most of the older literature follows, or on 6 August 1698 by the one Axworthy and the Cambridge History prefer; the disagreement is real and both dates should be carried. His people were the Qirqlu branch of the Afshars, a Turkmen tribe — and the detail that matters is why they were where they were. The Safavids had settled Afshar groups in northern Khorasan from the sixteenth century to hold the frontier and screen Mashhad against Uzbek raiding. Nadir's tribe was an instrument of the previous conquest, planted in that valley by the dynasty he would replace. He grew up inside the machinery, at its cheapest and most peripheral joint, herding.

His father, a herdsman who may also have made coats, died when Nadir was young. What he did next is the ordinary career of a capable man in a country without a state: he gathered armed followers, took service under whoever locally was paying, married the daughters of Baba Ali Beg, the Afshar governor of Abivard, and made himself indispensable. He submitted to Malek Mahmud at Mashhad and then broke with him, established himself in the mountain fortress of Kalat, and raided Sistani's territory with a force given as around twelve hundred men.

Now set out what that position actually offered him, and what it did not. The materials to hand were men, horses, a defensible fortress, a frontier full of other men in the same trade, and an unlimited supply of enemies whose defeat would produce more

men and more horses. What was absent was every single thing a man needs to convert that into anything more durable than his own reputation: no revenue system, no bureaucracy, no records, no legitimate office, no metropolitan authority to answer to or draw on, and above all no name. In 1726 Tahmasp II sent an agent, Hasan-Ali Beg Bestami, to look him over; the agent recommended him; Nadir joined the Safavid claimant, was made deputy governor of Abivard, exposed the Qajar chief Fath Ali Khan's secret correspondence with Sistani, saw him executed in October, took command of the shah's army, and adopted the title by which he would be known for the next decade.

The title is the whole argument in two words. He called himself **Tahmasp Qoli** — *slave of Tahmasp*. A man who has just made himself the strongest soldier in eastern Iran announces himself as another man's servant, and the other man is a penniless fugitive of twenty-two whose sole asset is his father's blood. That is not modesty and it is not deference. It is a rational purchase. Nadir needed his orders to be obeyed by people who had never met him, in towns he had not yet reached, and the only instrument in Iran that could do that was a name he did not have and could not manufacture — so he rented it, and paid for it in a title that advertised his own subordination, and it worked, and he went on paying for ten years. He fought the Abdalis at Herat, threw Ashraf out of Iran at Damghan and Murchakhort in 1729, restored Tahmasp to Isfahan, took the west back from the Ottomans, deposed Tahmasp in 1732 when the shah made a bad peace, and replaced him with Tahmasp's eight-month-old son as Abbas III — because even in 1732, with the country cleared and the army entirely his, the cheapest available way to keep issuing binding orders was still a Safavid infant.

Possession, and the thing it is not

This is where the landscape resolves into a single problem, and it is worth stating in plain terms because the whole of the reign is an attempt to solve it.

A man who holds ground has possession. He can take what is on it and he can give what is on it away. What he cannot do, merely by holding it, is make the giving *stick* — because anything he hands over is worth exactly as long as his continuing ability to hold the ground it sits on, and everyone who receives anything from him knows this and prices it accordingly. What he issues is not a grant but a licence, revocable at his death by the simple fact of his death. And a licence manufactures no defenders. The man holding one has nothing to lose by the arrangement's collapse that he was not going to lose anyway when the granter's heart stopped.

Ownership is different in kind, not degree. Ownership is the power to convey a thing that stays conveyed — and it requires a warrant, some source of title standing outside the granter's own arm, which the receiver already honours, so that what he is handed is his by a right the granter did not invent and cannot casually revoke. A warrant is why a grant survives the man who made it. It is what makes a settlement possible: an actual division of the conquered wealth among named people who thereafter hold positions they would lose if the arrangement fell, and who therefore defend the arrangement without being told to, every day, for their own reasons. That reflexive defence is the whole difference between an order and an army. Without it a ruler must be personally present at every point where his authority is doubted, must reward continuously out of current revenue because he cannot reward permanently out of title, and must terrify continuously because fear is the only cost he can impose that does not depend on institutions he does not have.

That is what it means to be a warlord rather than a sovereign: not that he is weaker, since he may be far stronger than any sovereign in reach, but that his structure has a life expectancy equal to his own, because nothing in it can be owned by anybody else.

Iran in 1726 had a warrant. It was current, it was honoured across the whole core population, and it had survived the total destruction of the state that once issued it — pretenders were sprouting from the stump in every province, and both the Ottoman and Russian empires were bidding for the branches. But it was a warrant of a particular kind. It was not vested in an office, which a stranger can enter; it was vested in a bloodline, which he cannot. It could be rented and it could not be bought. Nadir rented it for ten years, and rent is not title, and a tenant cannot convey.

Reading the Afsharid landscape against the framework

The framework asks, of any conquest, the question that predicts the shape of everything after it: *is there a seat in it, and can a stranger sit down?* Iran between 1722 and 1726 shows that this question is doing the work of two, and that the two come apart — which is the refinement this landscape contributes.

The first is whether the prior order left an **instrument**: an apparatus of rule a newcomer can capture and operate — tax registers, a chain of appointment, a command that binds, a bureaucracy that knows how to find the harvest. The second is whether it left a **warrant**: a source of title the population already honours, by which what the newcomer grants becomes the grantee's own rather than a revocable favour. Existing cases in this collection have mostly met the two together or missed them together, which is why one question has served. Northern Nigeria supplied both at once, and the Caliph's power to appoint and depose emirs was simultaneously the

machine and the licence to run it, so a conqueror could sit down in a single motion. Iran in the 1720s is the case that pulls them apart, and it pulls them apart in the harder direction: **the instrument was destroyed and the warrant survived.**

That combination is worse than losing both, and the reason is precise. A conqueror who inherits nothing at all knows he must build from the ground and prices the job accordingly. A conqueror who inherits a live, universally honoured warrant that he is personally disqualified from holding faces a cheaper option that is not a solution — he can rent it. Renting works immediately, costs almost nothing, and postpones the problem indefinitely, which is exactly what makes it a trap: every year of successful renting is a year in which no title of his own is being built, while the borrowed name is being visibly devalued by his own use of it, since everyone can see who commands the army and who does not. Nadir's ten years as *slave of Tahmasp* were not a delay before his real reign. They were his real reign, conducted on someone else's credit, and they ended with him holding more ground than any ruler in Asia and no more ability to convey it than he had had at Kalat.

Two further refinements follow, and they will be tested rather than assumed as the modules proceed.

The first is about the kinds of warrant, and it sharpens the card's account of how the trusted-information leg is acquired — forged, redirected, or inherited. Those three describe how an apex gets *hold* of the channel. This case adds a prior question about what the channel is made of, because it determines which of the three is even available. Where the prior order vested its warrant in an **office**, a stranger may inherit it by occupying the office, and where it vested it in an **institution** — a church, a clerisy, a shrine — he may redirect it by capturing the institution. But where it vested the warrant in a **bloodline**, both cheap routes are closed by definition, and the only remaining options are to marry into it, to rent it through a puppet, or to forge a new currency outright. Mahmud tried marriage and the ceremony of conveyance, and got nothing. Nadir tried renting, and it held for a decade and conveyed nothing. What is left is forgery, which the card names as the expensive option that a sharp audience may catch — and the eleven years that follow are, among other things, the cleanest experimental test of that proposition the collection is likely to get, because it was attempted by a man with uncontested force, unlimited will, and a documented, dated, decade-long diplomatic campaign to get the coin recognised by the only party who could mint it.

The second is about extraction and settlement together, and it is stated here as a prediction to be checked rather than a finding. If ownership is the precondition of a settlement, and a settlement is what manufactures the class of people who defend an

order for their own reasons, then an apex who cannot own cannot settle, and an apex who cannot settle has no one in his arrangement with a stake in next year's harvest. The tuning mechanism on the extraction rate — the thing that makes a rational extractor ease off before he kills the producer — may turn out to be supplied not by the ruler's prudence but by the settlement's beneficiaries, who need the peasant alive because their own position is a claim on his future output rather than on this season's plunder. Where nobody holds such a claim, there may be nothing in the machine that pulls the rate back down. Whether Iran in the 1740s shows that is a question for the evidence, not for this page.

Finally, the discipline the whole landscape is built to protect. That the Safavid descent from the Seventh Imam was almost certainly invented, and was visibly unprovable to a Jesuit doing arithmetic in Isfahan in 1720, does not make Iranian Shi'ism a fraud or the Iranians who honoured it dupes. It makes it a thing that was built and then became real — real enough that it kept issuing valid orders for decades after the state that founded it had been eaten, real enough that two empires bid for its remnants, real enough that the strongest soldier in Asia called himself a slave rather than do without it. The origin was manufactured; the belief was not a performance. That is precisely why it was worth so much, and precisely why it could not be taken by force. Naming a conquered origin is not debunking, and a built thing that took is more durable than a lie, not less. Nadir's whole career is a demonstration of the point from the outside: he had every instrument of power except the one that had been made by two centuries of ordinary people believing something, and it was the one he could not manufacture, could not seize, and — in the end — could not do without.

A note on sources

The primary quotations here are from public-domain sources and are given as those editions print them, with their original spelling and capitalisation. The eyewitness description of Shah Ismail's standing among the qizilbash, and of the seal of Ismail carried on a chain by the ruler of Mosul, are from *The Travels of a Merchant in Persia*, an anonymous Venetian account of 1507–10, in Charles Grey's translation for the Hakluyt Society, *A Narrative of Italian Travels in Persia in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (1873), pp. 205–206; the merchant states that he was present for some events and reports others at second hand from participants, and the passages quoted describe what he saw at Tabriz. All quotations concerning the Safavid genealogy, the famine, and the abdication are from Judasz Tadeusz Krusiński's memoirs as published in English as *The History of the Late Revolutions of Persia* (London, 1733), vol. I (the origin of the family of the Sophies) and vol. II (the siege, pp. 90–99); Krusinski was

resident in Isfahan and inside the city for the siege, and his reticence on the death toll — that he read Armenian letters giving a figure he would neither affirm nor deny — is reproduced rather than resolved. Note that his text reaches the reader through Du Cerceau's French edition and then an eighteenth-century English rendering, so the wording is bounded by those editions.

Figures are given as ranges where the record disagrees. Estimates of the Afghan force at Gulnabad run from about ten thousand to twenty thousand and of the Safavid army from about forty thousand to fifty thousand or more, with Safavid dead put at five to fifteen thousand; deaths during the siege of Isfahan are commonly given as upward of eighty thousand, with contemporary reports considerably higher and no reliable upper bound. Pre-siege estimates of Isfahan's population range from two hundred thousand (Herbert, 1627–29) to five hundred thousand (Olearius, 1637; Chardin, late seventeenth century). Nadir's birth is given as November 1688 in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* and much of the older literature and as 6 August 1698 by Axworthy and the *Cambridge History of Iran*; both are carried.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited, not quoted: Rudi Matthee on the structural weakening of the late Safavid state and the disproportion of the 1722 collapse; Laurence Lockhart on the fall of the dynasty and on Nadir; Michael Axworthy on Nadir's early career and dating; Ernest Tucker on Afsharid legitimacy; John Perry on the Safavid pretenders after 1722; Willem Floor and Said Amir Arjomand on the Safavid religious offices, the *sadr* and the *mullabashi*; Andrew Newman for the dissenting view on the scale and politics of the Jabal Amil clerical migration, which is noted in the text as disputed rather than settled; and the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* entries on the Safavids, the Afsharids, Nader Shah, Khorasan in the Safavid and Afsharid periods, Isfahan's population, and Shi'ite hierarchy, including the detail of the Imam Reza shrine's reserves being taken first by a Safavid commander and then by Malek Mahmud Sistani to strike coin in his own name. Treaty terms and dates for St Petersburg (1723) and Constantinople (1724) follow the standard accounts, including the clause providing for joint action and the installation of a ruler should the Safavid claimant refuse. Where the fate of Sultan Husayn is given as 1726 in some accounts and 1727 in others, both are stated. No quotation, date, attribution or figure in this module has been reconstructed from memory; where a line's provenance could not be confirmed against a source reproducing the primary text, it has been left out.

A COLUMN OF FIRE

Module 1 · The Floor of Force — the best army in Asia, assembled out of the men it defeated and paid out of the treasuries it took, and why a floor built that way can never be permitted to stand still

Twelve hundred men in a mountain fort

The floor begins as small as a floor can begin. In the middle 1720s, with Isfahan held by Afghans, the Caspian provinces held by Russians, the whole west held by Ottomans, and Khorasan held by a Sistani adventurer who had struck coin from the silver of the Imam's shrine, Nadr Qoli of the Qirqlu Afshars established himself in the mountain fortress of Kalat, north of Mashhad, and raided that adventurer's territory with a force the accounts put at about twelve hundred men.

Follow the same instrument forward. By the time he joined the Safavid claimant in 1726 he brought a following that helped make up a combined army of some thirty thousand besieging Mashhad. By 1733, on the best modern reconstruction, he had a hundred thousand fighting troops. The Armenian Catholicos Abraham of Crete, an eyewitness at the coronation in 1736, put the host on the Mughan steppe at between a hundred and twenty and a hundred and eighty thousand. By 1741 the figure is around a hundred and fifty thousand, and for the supreme effort of the 1743 campaign against the Ottomans the total across field armies, detachments and garrisons has been reckoned at three hundred and seventy-five thousand — a figure large enough to demand a check, and the check is this: the Austrian army in 1756 numbered 177,500 and the Prussian 143,000. Whatever the precise number, the order of magnitude is not in doubt. Within about fifteen years the same man went from twelve hundred raiders to the largest and probably the most effective military force on earth.

That is the fact this module has to explain, and then the fact it has to set against everything else the man could not do. He was never defeated in a pitched battle he chose to fight. He beat the Ghilzai Afghans who had destroyed the Safavid state, beat the Ottoman field armies repeatedly, brought the Russians to terms without fighting them, took Kandahar, crossed the Khyber, destroyed the Mughal army in an afternoon at Karnal, sacked Delhi, took Bukhara and Khiva, seized Bahrain, and was building a fleet in the Persian Gulf. And the arrangement he built with all of that lasted eleven

years and disintegrated inside a year of his death without a single foreign soldier crossing the frontier to push it.

What the thing was made of

Nadir's army was not a Persian national army, and it was not a tribal host either. It was a composite, and the composition was deliberate.

The largest element, and the one he inherited from the landscape rather than invented, was tribal cavalry: lightly armoured horsemen with lance and broadsword, raised from the pastoral nomad confederations — Afshar, Qajar, Kurd, Bakhtiari, Lur, Turkmen, Arab, Baluch — the same reservoir of mounted men that had carried every Iranian dynasty since the Seljuks and had spent the 1720s fighting one another. To this he added, and progressively made central, the thing the Safavids had possessed but never properly exploited: massed, drilled, gunpowder infantry.

There were two grades. The *tofangchi* were line infantry with matchlock muskets, recruited largely from the settled peasantry, carrying a dagger or a *shamshir* for the close work. Above them stood the *jazayerchi*, the elite, and they are the technical heart of the whole system. The *jazayer* was a very heavy large-bore musket fired from a rest — the surviving specimens and the eyewitness descriptions put the weight at something between about nineteen and twenty-eight kilograms depending on the piece, several times the weight of a contemporary British Brown Bess. Abraham of Crete, watching the guard at the coronation, described men leaning on their guns as though on staves, the barrels banded half in gold rings and half in silver, with words of God written on their felt caps. Loaded from a powder horn rather than a paper cartridge, the *jazayer* was slower to reload than a European musket and considerably longer in range, heavier in impact, and more accurate. By the 1740s the corps numbered something on the order of twelve thousand, alongside a far larger body of ordinary musketeers; they were better paid, better clothed, drilled daily, and frequently mounted on ponies or mules so that the army's firepower could move at the speed of its cavalry and then dismount to fight — dragoons in function if not in name.

Then the guns. Nadir kept a siege train of heavy pieces and mortars where he could drag them, and he was prepared to drag them absurd distances and up mountains. But the instrument that made his field battles work was the *zamburak*: a one- or two-pounder swivel gun mounted on a camel saddle, fired from the animal's back with the camel couched, so that the beast was simultaneously the carriage, the platform and a certain amount of cover. Jonas Hanway, writing from the reports of Englishmen who were on the ground, described them as very long swivel guns fixed on pack-saddles and carried by camels, which "carried cartridge-shot to a great distance, and made great

havock." They were inaccurate and short-ranged next to real field artillery, and they could go anywhere a camel could go, which in that theatre meant everywhere; the army kept many hundreds of them.

And the composition across peoples was policy, not accident. He recruited across every ethnic and confessional line in and around Iran — Shi'i Persians and Turkmen, Sunni Afghans of both the Abdali and Ghilzai confederations, Sunni Uzbeks, Christian Georgians and Armenians, Kurds, Arabs — and the standard reading of why is that a mixed army competes with itself for favour and cannot easily combine against the man at the top. Any large ethnic bloc within it can be balanced by another. It is a sound instrument, and it is worth noticing at the outset what kind of instrument it is: it is a solution to the problem of an army that might turn on its commander, applied by a commander who had no other way of solving that problem, because he had nothing to give his officers that would have made turning on him unprofitable.

"Like a column of fire"

The way these parts fitted together can be recovered from the official history, which is the account written by Nadir's own secretary, Mirza Mahdi Khan Astarabadi, and which is quoted here in the English that William Jones published in 1773. It is a partisan document and it will be read as one; but on the mechanics of a battle it is a technical witness, and its technical descriptions are consistent with the accounts of his enemies.

Against Ashraf's Afghans in 1729, Astarabadi describes a formation and a discipline that would not have been out of place in Europe. Nadir

> *"drew the flower of his army into a compact phalanx, ordering them to keep their ground in a most profound silence, that they might hear his orders to a moment"*

— and the aside that follows is the sort of detail a friendly witness supplies without calculation, and is worth more than a page of praise: his voice, according to a man who had heard it at the siege of Baghdad, "was uncommonly clear and strong." The Afghans came on fast and unfolded to right and left to envelop him; Nadir "covered the sides of his phalanx with his artillery"; Ashraf, mistaking the stillness of the Persian line for irresolution, closed to musket range, and

> *"Nader gave the word, and the Persians fired with great steadiness, marching at the same time with incredible order... the Persian phalanx still advanced like a column of fire, striking down whole lines at every discharge."*

That is the system: a firepower core that does not break and does not run, advancing by volley, with mobile guns on the flanks and cavalry held for the moment when the enemy formation comes apart. It is what killed the Afghan tactical superiority that had destroyed the Safavid army seven years earlier, and it went on working against everyone else.

Against the Ottomans at Baghavard near Erivan on 8 June 1735, the same history gives the Ottoman army as seventy thousand horse and fifty thousand foot including janissaries, against fifteen thousand Persians — figures that should be treated as the official chronicler's arithmetic rather than the historian's, since eight-to-one odds are exactly what a court history exists to report, and the true disparity was probably considerable but smaller. What the account describes actually happening is again the firepower core doing the work: a detachment sent straight at the Ottoman gunners, who abandoned their pieces, and then

> *"the Persians did incredible execution with their musketry, whilst the Turkish cavalry, galled with the smartness of their fire, began to be thrown into disorder."*

And at Karnal on 24 February 1739, against the Mughal empire, the same machine produced the most lopsided result of the century. Nadir's field army in India was something on the order of fifty-five thousand; the Mughal host is conventionally given at two to three hundred thousand, of which only a fraction was ever engaged. He drew Sa'adat Khan's contingent forward with a small mounted detachment of *jazayerchi*, lured a second Mughal commander into an ambush at a village where dismounted Qajar, Bakhtiari and Kurdish troops waited behind walls with their heavy muskets and camel guns, and destroyed the striking arm of an empire in about three hours. Estimates of the Mughal dead run from around ten thousand to twenty or thirty thousand; what is not disputed is that some four hundred Mughal officers were killed, which is the number that actually mattered, since it was the command of the army rather than its bulk that had been removed.

The men came from the enemy

Now the mechanism that made the growth possible, and it is stated plainly in the official history, repeatedly, without any apparent awareness that it is the study's central fact.

Of an early Khorasan campaign, Astarabadi records that Nadir took several strong places by assault, and that

"he enlisted the young captives into his army, and distributed the spoils among his own Afshars."

That sentence is the engine in miniature. The defeated supply the manpower; the plunder pays the core. Of the march on Kabul in 1738 the same source says he destroyed a considerable number of Afghans in the mountains "but selected those, who had either youth or vigour, and enlisted them in his cavalry." At the siege of Kandahar in 1738 the tower called Dehdeh was taken by a company of Bakhtiaris "who were enlisted in the service of Nader Shah" — a Zagros tribe fighting for a Khorasani Afshar against Ghilzai Pashtuns, for pay. After the reduction of Khiva in November 1740, Hanway records that Nadir marched away taking with him nearly twenty thousand Persians who had been held there in captivity, together with eight thousand Uzbeks "as recruits," and left a governor of his own appointing attended only by a few Persians, "as if he was sure of the obedience of these Tartars, or thought them not worth an army to keep them in awe."

The Abdali Afghans of Herat, beaten in 1729 and again in the early 1730s, entered his service in large numbers and became one of the most trusted elements in the army; their commander in his service was a young man named Ahmad Khan Abdali, who would take the treasury east in 1747 and found the state that became Afghanistan. The Ghilzai, whom he destroyed at Kandahar, likewise supplied contingents. Georgians served him. So did the Lezgins of Daghestan when they were not fighting him.

Read as a machine, then, the floor worked like this. A victory produced three things at once: plunder to pay the existing army, prisoners to enlarge it, and a defeated territory to garrison. Each of the three increased the running cost. The enlarged army needed more pay than the plunder of the last campaign would cover for long; the new garrisons had to be maintained; and the men newly enlisted had joined for pay and prospects rather than for any belief about who ought to rule Iran, so their loyalty had precisely the duration of the payments. The only reliable source of the sums required was another victory. This is not a moral observation about a greedy man. It is an arithmetical property of an army recruited by conquest and paid from conquest, and it means that such an army has no stable resting state: standing still is the one thing it cannot afford, because standing still means paying out of revenue what has been being paid out of plunder, and the revenue does not exist.

What it cost to keep

The numbers survive well enough to make the point sharply. Hanway, computing the burden in a footnote, reckoned that twelve months' pay for a hundred and forty

thousand men came "at the ordinary computation" to three million four hundred thousand pounds sterling. That is a figure to sit with. It is the annual wage bill of a great-power army being carried by a country whose capital had been depopulated by famine seventeen years earlier, whose western provinces had been fought over three times, whose Caspian trade had collapsed, and whose peasantry had spent two decades being requisitioned by whoever was passing.

For a period the gap was closed from outside. After Karnal, Nadir occupied Delhi from 20 March 1739. On the night of the 21st a rumour spread that he had been killed, and the crowds turned on his soldiers and killed a substantial number of them — the accounts give figures from around nine hundred up to three thousand. On the 22nd he ordered the *qatl-i amm*, the general massacre, and something between twenty and thirty thousand people were killed in a day, with higher figures in some accounts and no reliable count, since the bodies were burned or tipped into pits; a Dutch Company representative reported around ten thousand women and children taken as slaves. A fine of twenty million rupees was levied on the city. The imperial treasury was handed over, along with the Peacock Throne and the great diamonds. The total is conventionally given at around seven hundred million rupees, and every figure in this paragraph should be held loosely except the shape of it, which is that a single campaign produced more portable wealth than any European state of the day could raise in a decade.

What he did with it is the diagnostic. Hanway records that he paid the army its arrears and added a gratuity on top, specifically as an inducement to the men to declare and bring in their private plunder rather than conceal it, and that these payments were made in a coinage struck for the occasion bearing the legend that Nadir, master of fortune and king of kings, was the most powerful prince of the earth, with the reverse asking God to perpetuate his reign. Money moving out of a treasury into the hands of soldiers, stamped with the payer's name and a prayer: that is what the Indian campaign was for, and the coin says so.

He also, from India, sent home a decree of tax relief. Hanway, a contemporary reporting what actually reached the provinces, says it exempted the country from taxes for a whole year commencing on 10 March, and that officials who had begun collecting were ordered to refund what they had taken, which they did. Most of the later literature reports a three-year remission. The discrepancy is worth stating rather than smoothing, because either version tells the same story about the structure: the internal revenue system was not the thing that paid for the army, and for as long as external plunder held out it could be suspended entirely. The rest of the treasure went into the mountains. Hanway again: "His chief concern was the security of his vast treasure; he

therefore marched to Kalat... Here he established a sufficient guard of his best troops." The wealth of the Mughal empire was carried to the fortress where the whole enterprise had begun with twelve hundred men, and put behind a guard.

The fleet he could not build

The clearest small demonstration of what force could and could not accomplish is the navy, because the Gulf was the one theatre in which the thing required was not an army but an institution.

In 1734 Nadir appointed Mohammad Latif Khan as his admiral, with orders to establish a base at Bushehr and to buy ships from the Dutch and English companies. The companies were reluctant to sell, and under a certain amount of pressure Latif Khan obtained two English brigantines and two more from a local Arab shaikh. In April 1735 he moved against Ottoman Basra and the attempt failed when the Ottomans commandeered two powerful English ships that happened to be in port. In May 1736 Latif Khan simply copied the manoeuvre: he seized the British East Indiaman *Northumberland* at Bushehr and sailed with her and a number of smaller vessels to Bahrain, which he took without difficulty.

Then the pattern reasserts itself. Persian shipwrights at Bushehr could not build the ships he wanted in the numbers he wanted; a cannon foundry was set up near Bandar Abbas; hulls were increasingly ordered from Indian yards; by the mid-1740s the fleet numbered something like thirty vessels. But the crews were Arab seamen of the Gulf coast, and they mutinied repeatedly. Admirals were poisoned by rival commanders and replaced by worse ones. In 1740 mutineers were raiding the Iranian coast. The demands for men and money for the fleet became a standing grievance in the southern provinces.

The comparison is exact and it is not a metaphor. Nadir could *take* a ship — could take the finest ship in the Gulf, from the world's most formidable trading company, in an afternoon, and use it to conquer an island. What he could not do was cause a fleet to exist, because a fleet is not a thing that is seized but a thing that is maintained: yards, timber contracts, a foundry, trained crews with careers, officers with something to lose. Every one of those requires people who hold their position by a title that outlives this campaign, and that is precisely the currency he did not have. He had unlimited possession and no ownership, and possession is enough for a ship and not enough for a navy.

Where the floor stopped

The floor had one theatre it could not take, and it is the exception that proves what the machine was.

Between 1741 and 1743 Nadir campaigned in the mountains of Daghestan against the Lezgins, Avars, Tabasarans, Kumyks and their neighbours, in part to avenge his brother Ebrahim Khan, killed there in 1739. Everything that made the army invincible in the open was useless in those valleys. There was nothing to take: no capital, no treasury, no army that would stand and be shot at, no ruler who could surrender on everyone's behalf. The mountain communities withdrew before him, raided his columns and his supply lines, and came back when he moved on. Persian losses came overwhelmingly from weather, disease and attrition rather than battle. The historiography here is genuinely contested and should be reported as such: Dagestani and Russian traditions record a decisive defeat at Andalal in September 1741, with figures running to tens of thousands of men and dozens of guns lost, while the Persian chronicles record no pitched battle at all and describe a withdrawal to winter quarters harassed by raiders. What is not contested is the outcome. He did not subdue the Avars, and when he died the mountain communities came down and repossessed what they had lost.

It was in Daghestan, too, that the floor first turned inward. An attempt was made on his life near Derbent in 1741; the would-be assassin named his eldest son, Reza Qoli, as the man behind it; and Nadir had his son blinded. The consequences of that belong to another part of this study. Recorded here it is simply the first time the instrument was used on the apex's own household, and the date is worth fixing: 1742, five years before the end, and two years after the treasure came home.

The founding legend, and what it does not say

Every floor comes with a story about itself, and this one's is unusually accessible because the man who wrote it worked in the tent. Astarabadi's account opens with Nadir advancing "from the deserts bordering on the Caspian Sea" to attack "the enemies of his country" — the deliverer, arriving from the frontier to save Iran from Afghans, Ottomans and Russians. And that claim is, as it happens, substantially true: the Afghans were expelled, the Ottomans were driven back to the 1639 line, the Russians withdrew from the Caspian provinces by the treaties of Resht and Ganja, and the country was reassembled. A study that refused to credit this would be lying.

What the legend does not say is what the same document, read for what it lets slip, records perfectly plainly. That the army was made of enlisted captives. That the spoils

were distributed among the Afshars — his own people, first. That the young and vigorous among the defeated were selected and put in the cavalry and the rest destroyed. Even the account of his origins carries a small tell: Astarabadi is at pains to explain that his master's birth "was neither eminently high, nor contemptibly low," which is the sort of sentence a secretary writes when the answer is low and cannot be said. The deliverance of Iran and the enlistment of the captives are the same set of events described from two ends, and neither cancels the other.

And there is one thing the legend obscures by omission that matters more than anything it asserts. A conquering order is normally expected to do two things to the population beneath it: take away its weapons, and close its exits. Nadir did neither. He did not disarm Iran — he could not have, and he did not try; Iran in the 1730s was a country of armed pastoral confederations, and his entire method was to hire them rather than break them. He did not close the roads; flight, desertion and migration ran continuously throughout the reign and became torrential in the 1740s. What he did instead was simpler and, while it lasted, far more effective: he made himself the best-paying employer of organised violence between the Bosphorus and the Indus, so that for a young man with a horse in Khorasan or Kandahar or Khiva the rational move was to join him. That is not a monopoly of force. It is a dominant market share in it, held by outbidding the alternatives, and it is exactly as durable as the bidding.

Reading the floor against the framework

The framework's first move is to establish who held organised violence at the founding, and by what act. Afsharid Iran returns an unambiguous answer on the instrument and a disquieting one on the act, and the two together sharpen the framework in a specific way.

On the instrument: this is the strongest floor in the collection by a wide margin. It out-fought the Ottoman empire, the Mughal empire, the Uzbek khanates and the Afghan confederations, in that order, within a decade, with a combined-arms system — heavy musketry drilled to hold and advance under voice command, camel-borne mobile guns, and cavalry held for exploitation — that was genuinely in advance of what most of its opponents could field. Nothing about the collapse of 1747 is explained by military weakness, and any account that reaches for one is reaching for the wrong shelf.

On the act, the case makes a distinction the card should carry. The framework says the floor comes first and the belief is laid over it afterwards to make the order cheap. That remains right. What this case adds is that **the floor itself comes in two forms, and only one of them can be laid on.** There is a floor that is a *monopoly* — the conqueror has taken the population's weapons, closed the exits, and made himself the

only supplier of protection and the only purchaser of violence, so that the ruled cannot fight and cannot leave, and the coercive class cannot go anywhere else. And there is a floor that is a *market position* — the conqueror has left the weapons where they are and the roads open, and holds his position by paying more than anyone else pays, so that his army serves him for the same reason it would serve someone else and his subjects submit because he is the largest armed party in the district this year. Both look identical on a battlefield. They behave completely differently over time, because the first has a fixed cost and the second has a cost that rises with every success, and because the first can be inherited and the second cannot: a successor inherits a monopoly, but he inherits only the *option to keep bidding*, and if the treasury is at Kalat behind a guard and the plunder has stopped, he cannot exercise it.

This is the same distinction the previous part of this study drew between possession and ownership, now visible one level down, inside the apparatus of force itself — and it explains why the two travel together. A ruler who could convey ownership would not need to outbid: he could pay his officers in positions rather than in cash, in titles their sons would hold, and their defence of him would then be their defence of themselves and would cost him nothing annually. Because Nadir could convey nothing that outlived him, every man in his army had to be paid again, and the payment had to come from somewhere, and after 1739 there was nowhere left that was worth invading. The floor's magnificence and the floor's instability are not two facts about this case. They are one fact, seen from the front and from the side.

Two smaller findings attach, both to be carried and tested rather than settled here. The first is that **deliberate ethnic diversification of a coercive class is a tell.** Nadir's mixing of Afshar, Qajar, Kurd, Georgian, Abdali, Ghilzai and Uzbek is usually and rightly read as a device to prevent his officers combining. But a ruler who has bound his coordinating class by giving it something to lose does not need such a device, and the corpus should ask, wherever it finds engineered heterogeneity in an armed elite, whether it is present *instead of* a settlement rather than *alongside* one. The second is that the Gulf fleet supplies a clean natural experiment on the limits of force, because it is the one place where Nadir's requirements exceeded what could be seized. He could take the finest ship in the Gulf and could not produce a navy, for the same structural reason that he could take Delhi and could not produce a successor: seizure is instantaneous and institutions are cumulative, and cumulation requires people whose positions survive the man who granted them.

A closing discipline, since the material invites two opposite errors. The army of Nadir Shah was a real and formidable achievement of organisation, drill and command, built by a herdsman's son who learned it in the field, and to explain it away as mere

plunder would be false. It also enlisted captives, distributed the spoils by tribe, and killed twenty to thirty thousand people in Delhi in a day. Legibility is not pardon, and neither is admiration for the machine. The point of reconstructing it in this detail is not to award marks but to show precisely what was and was not accomplished — so that when the collapse comes, eleven years later, nobody is tempted to look for a lost battle.

A note on sources

Primary quotations are given as the public-domain editions print them. All quotations attributed to the official history are from Mirza Mahdi Khan Astarabadi's *Tarikh-i Jahangusha-yi Naderi*, in the English abridgement published by William Jones as *The History of the Life of Nader Shah* (London, 1773) — the passages on the compact phalanx and the "column of fire" at the defeat of Ashraf, on the musketry at Baghavard, on the enlistment of the young captives and the distribution of the spoils among the Afshars, on the Bakhtiaris at Kandahar, on the selection of Afghan recruits before Kabul, and on Nadir's birth at Dastgird on 11 November 1688. Astarabadi was Nadir's own secretary and wrote as his official historiographer; every quotation from him is quotation from an interested witness inside the tent, and where his figures favour his master — most obviously the eight-to-one odds claimed at Baghavard — that is stated in the text rather than passed on. Quotations from Jonas Hanway are from *An Historical Account of the British Trade over the Caspian Sea… to which are added, the Revolutions of Persia during the present Century* (London, 1753), vol. II: the description of the long swivel guns carried on camel pack-saddles; the reduction of Khiva with eighteen cannon and sixteen mortars and the departure with some twenty thousand liberated Persian captives and eight thousand Uzbek recruits; the payment of arrears with an added gratuity to induce the men to declare their plunder, and the legend of the coin struck for it; the decree remitting taxes for a whole year from 10 March; and the securing of the treasure at Kalat. Hanway wrote from the reports of British merchants in Persia and is a well-informed but second-hand and hostile witness.

Figures are given as ranges where the record disagrees, and their provenance is stated. The army's growth (about 100,000 by 1733; 120,000–180,000 at the 1736 coronation on Abraham of Crete's estimate; about 150,000 by 1741; a total in the region of 375,000 for the 1743 campaign), the comparison with the Austrian and Prussian establishments of the 1750s, the weight and character of the *jazayer*, and the composition and function of the *jazayerchi*, *tofangchi* and *zamburakchi* follow Michael Axworthy's "The Army of Nader Shah" (*Iranian Studies* 40:5, 2007) and *The Sword of Persia*, and the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* article on the army of the Afshar and Zand

periods, which is also the source for the reading of deliberate ethnic diversification. Abraham of Crete's eyewitness description of the guard at the coronation reaches modern readers only through G. A. Bournoutian's copyrighted translation and is therefore paraphrased here, not quoted. Karnal (24 February 1739) is given with Nadir's field army at about 55,000 against a Mughal host conventionally put at 200,000–300,000 with far fewer engaged, and Mughal dead at roughly 10,000 to 30,000 depending on the account, with some four hundred officers killed. The Delhi massacre of 22 March 1739 is given at 20,000–30,000 killed in a day, with higher figures in some accounts and no reliable count; the enslavement figure of about ten thousand women and children comes from a Dutch East India Company representative in the city; the fine of twenty million rupees and the conventional total of some seven hundred million rupees for the plunder are reported as conventional rather than established. The naval material follows the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* article on Nader Shah and the Iranian navy and the work of Willem Floor, including the appointment of Mohammad Latif Khan in 1734, the failed attempt on Basra in April 1735, and the seizure of the East Indiaman *Northumberland* at Bushehr in May 1736 and the consequent capture of Bahrain. The Daghestan campaign of 1741–43 is reported as contested: the Dagestani and Russian historiographical tradition records a major Persian defeat at Andalal in September 1741 with very heavy losses, while the Persian chronicles record no pitched battle there, and both positions are stated rather than adjudicated. The remission of taxation after India is given in both the forms the record supplies — one year in Hanway's contemporary report, three years in most later accounts. No quotation, date, attribution or figure here has been reconstructed from memory; the towers of skulls, the extraction crisis of the 1740s, and the assassination of 1747 are recorded elsewhere in this study where the evidence for them can be set out properly.

PAID IN HIS OWN COIN

Module 2 · The Settlement — the audit returns not an empty page but a policy: a conqueror who understood exactly what a settlement was, and dismantled the instrument that makes one, because a ruler with no warrant cannot afford to create owners

The question, and why the expected answer is wrong

The question this module exists to ask is blunt and it is asked of every man in the hierarchy in turn. *If this arrangement collapsed tomorrow, would he be worse off?* Where the answer is yes at most links, the order reproduces itself without instruction: every beneficiary, defending his own holding, is thereby defending the whole, and no one has to be told. Where the answer is no, the order is a payroll, and a payroll stops when the payer does.

The expectation going into this material was that the audit would return an empty page — that a man campaigning without pause for eleven years simply never got round to distributing anything, and that the absence would be an omission. That is not what the record shows, and the difference matters more than the omission would have. Nadir did not fail to make a settlement. He inherited a country in which the instruments for making one were still lying about — land assignments, tax farms, hereditary offices, and above all a vast body of endowed property that had underwritten an entire class for two centuries — and he took them apart, deliberately, with a survey and a decree, and replaced them with a wage. The empty page is not an oversight in the record. It is the policy, and it was pursued with the same methodical energy he brought to a siege.

What he took in

Start with what he did to the largest pool of protected wealth in Iran.

Under the Safavids, the *waqf* — property endowed in perpetuity for a religious or charitable purpose — had grown into an immense sector. Shrines, mosques, madrasas and their lands, the endowed centre of Isfahan itself, the estates attached to the shrine of the Eighth Imam at Mashhad: these funded the ulama, the courts, the schools, and the whole apparatus of trusted interpretation. And the crucial thing about *waqf* in Islamic law is not that it was large but that it was **inalienable**. Once endowed, the property could not be sold, inherited, taxed, or resumed by a ruler. It was, in the strict

sense, the one form of holding in the system that a shah could not touch, which is precisely why so much property had been converted into it — a shelter as well as a piety.

Nadir touched it. He ordered a cadastral survey to establish what there was, producing land registers known as the *raqabat-e Naderi* — the Naderi properties. The confiscated endowment lands were incorporated under that head and placed under the administration of the *divan*, the state's own fiscal department. The Safavid framework of pious foundations was suspended.

Note the shape of the conversion, because it is the exact inverse of the one this framework is used to naming. A colonial statute typically converts a *relation* into a *thing*: land that was office, lineage right or collective patrimony becomes an estate that can be granted, so that a coordinating class can be bound by re-sourcing its title. Nadir's instrument runs the other way. It converts a *thing* into a *flow*: property held inalienably in perpetuity, beyond any ruler's reach, becomes an entry in a revenue register administered by his own officials and payable to his own treasury. The first conversion manufactures owners. The second abolishes them.

And there is a legal fiction underneath it, as there always is, and in this case it is the same instrument the next part of this study will examine for entirely different reasons. A shah could not simply announce that the law of endowments no longer applied; that is not a fiscal question but a religious one. But a shah who had just replaced the Safavid religious settlement with a reformed school of law — the *madhhab-i Ja'fari*, proclaimed at his coronation on the Mughan steppe on 8 March 1736 — had by that act put the whole Safavid framework of endowments in question, and the suspension of the pious foundations followed from the establishment of the new *madhhab*. The religious reform was, among the several things it was, the legal warrant for the largest confiscation of the century. That does not make it insincere; a thing can be believed and useful at once, and the sincerity question belongs elsewhere. What it does mean is that the doctrinal move and the fiscal move were the same move, and any account that separates them will misread both.

What he paid out

Now the other side, and here the record is unusually explicit about intention. Nadir moved to pay his soldiers and his officials in **fixed salaries**, in cash, rather than from revenues derived from land tenure.

Understand what is being discarded. The standard method of paying a military and administrative class across the whole Persianate world was to assign a man the revenue of a district — *tuyul* in the Iranian vocabulary, *timar* in the Ottoman, *jagir* in the

Mughal. He collected it, kept his share, and served. The system is administratively cheap, because it requires no treasury and no transfers; and it has one further property, universally observed, which is that assignments drift toward heredity. The holder's son succeeds; the assignment becomes an estate; the estate becomes property; and within two or three generations a landed class exists whose members hold real positions and defend them. Iranian rulers of the following century found this out at their own expense: by the mid-nineteenth century a chief minister who tried to enforce the state's theoretical right to resume *tuyul* was being called, by a contemporary, the destroyer of the notables.

That drift is the settlement forming. It is the mechanism by which an army becomes a nobility and a payroll becomes an order. Every conqueror who has ever produced a durable arrangement has either used it or used something like it.

Nadir cut it off. Salaries in cash, from the centre, revocable at will, conveying nothing and inheritable by nobody. And to make the payment possible he rebuilt the currency: he claimed the sovereign's privilege of coinage, discontinued the Safavid silver *abbasi*, and struck a new silver piece, the *Naderi*, whose weight standard matched the Mughal rupee — a sensible measure for a ruler whose treasury was about to be filled from Delhi and whose army was about to be paid out of it. Hanway records the mechanics of that payment after the Indian campaign: arrears settled, a gratuity added to induce the men to declare their private plunder, and the whole disbursed in his own newly struck coin, stamped with the claim that Nadir, master of fortune and king of kings, was the most powerful prince of the earth.

A wage paid in the ruler's own coin is a beautifully exact instrument for what he wanted. It is portable, immediate, and universally accepted. It also expires the moment it is spent, creates no claim on anything, and leaves the recipient exactly as dependent on next month's payment as he was on last month's. Ten years of it produce no one who owns anything.

Khorasan, and the thing that looks like a settlement

There is one large exception that has to be examined, because at first sight it looks like a settlement and on inspection is something else.

Nadir moved the centre of gravity of Iran to his own province. Mashhad became the capital in place of Isfahan. Kalat, the mountain fortress north of Mashhad where the whole enterprise had begun with twelve hundred men, became the treasury: Hanway records that after India his chief concern was the security of his vast treasure, that he marched it to Kalat, and that he established there a sufficient guard of his best troops. And into Khorasan he moved people — in quantity, by force, and as policy. Thousands

of Bakhtiari families were transported there after the revolt of Ali Morad. Kurds were moved. The Karabakh lords of the Caucasus, several of whose houses had opposed his elevation at Mughan, were dealt with severely and their people displaced. Prisoners taken from Khiva and elsewhere were resettled. The pattern is old in Iran — the Safavids had planted his own Afshars in northern Khorasan in the first place to screen Mashhad against the Uzbeks — but Nadir ran it hard and ran it inward, toward his own base.

The effect was real: Khorasan and Mashhad were substantially enriched and strengthened, which is why the Afsharid rump survived there for decades after everything else was gone. But look at what was and was not created. Populations were moved; treasure was concentrated; a province was favoured. What was *not* done was the thing that would have made a settlement: no class of named men received holdings, on stated tenures, transmissible to their sons, which they would have lost if the arrangement fell. Deported Bakhtiari peasants in Khorasan are not stakeholders. They are relocated labour. A treasury behind a guard at Kalat is not a distribution; it is the opposite of one — it is the wealth of the empire physically removed from circulation and placed where exactly one man could authorise its release.

The audit, link by link

Run the chain, then, and ask the question of each link in turn. The results are consistent enough to be worth setting out in order.

The family. Nadir did what a dynast does: he put his blood in the great commands. His brother Ebrahim Khan governed Azerbaijan, and was killed in Daghestan in 1738. His eldest son Reza Qoli was made governor of Khorasan on the day of his coronation at the age of seventeen, with Tahmasp Khan Jalayer as his mentor, and was left as regent of Iran during the Indian campaign — a deliberate break with the Safavid habit of keeping princes in the harem, and on its face exactly the kind of investment that builds a house. In 1742, after an attempt on his life near Derbent in which the assassin named Reza Qoli, Nadir had his son blinded. His nephew Ali Qoli rose in revolt two months before the assassination of 1747, took the throne afterwards as Adil Shah, and had every one of Nadir's sons and grandsons killed except the thirteen-year-old Shahrokh. The apex's own kin did not defend the arrangement. They dismantled it and each other.

The great commanders. Mohammad Taqi Khan Shirazi had been a personal friend since 1730, was made governor of Fars, and was one of Nadir's favourites; he rebelled in January 1744, and when he was taken Nadir — who had sworn not to kill him — had him castrated and half-blinded, his brother and sons executed in front of him, and his

wife raped in front of him by his soldiers. Ahmad Khan Abdali commanded the Afghan contingent, was among the most trusted men in the army, and in the confusion after the assassination went east with a body of Afghan troops and a portion of the treasure and founded the state that became Afghanistan. The men closest to the top either revolted against the arrangement or walked away with as much of it as they could carry.

The tribal khans. Fath Ali Khan Qajar, who had brought Nadir into Tahmasp's service, was executed in October 1726 within weeks of the association beginning. The Karabakh houses — Ziyadoglu, Jevanshir and others — opposed his elevation at Mughan and were punished for it. Ali Morad, the Bakhtiari leader, revolted, was hunted into a cave, blinded, mutilated and killed; some three thousand families were seized, thousands were deported to Khorasan, and the rest were enlisted into the army. This is not a coordinating class being bound in. It is a coordinating class being broken up and redistributed as manpower.

The interpreter class. The Shi'i ulama had held endowments, courts and schools, and under the last Safavid a *mullabashi* had sat at the head of the whole establishment. Nadir suspended the endowment framework, folded the property into the *raqabat-e Naderi*, and killed the *mullabashi* Mirza Abu'l-Hasan in February 1736 — a man whose reported remark, that everyone was for the Safavid dynasty, is the plainest single statement of the problem this study is following. Whatever else the ulama were after 1736, they were a class that had been comprehensively expropriated and had every material reason to want the arrangement gone.

The merchants and the taxed. The Armenian merchants of Agulis petitioned the shah in the winter of 1742–43 about tax demands and the exactions of his officials, and the *farman* he issued in reply survives in the Matenadaran. It is a real document responding to a real grievance, and its context is the one that matters: after the Daghestan campaigns drained the treasury, governors were ordered to raise collections and to recover arrears, including from those previously exempted. The men doing the collecting were themselves being squeezed; treasury officials were executed for shortfalls. A tax farmer terrified of his own master is not a man defending an arrangement. He is a man surviving one.

The Georgians — the exception, and what it proves. There is one genuine grant of durable position in the whole reign, and it is the most revealing item in the audit. Teimuraz and his son Erekle had served Nadir loyally, campaigned with him toward India, and put down an anti-Persian revolt in Georgia in 1743; and as a reward, in 1744, Nadir granted Teimuraz the kingship of Kartli and Erekle the kingship of Kakheti, and married his nephew Ali Qoli to Teimuraz's daughter. On 1 October 1745

both men were crowned at Svetitskhoveli in Mtskheta by Christian rite — the first Christian coronation of Georgian kings since 1632.

That is a real conveyance of a real position. And notice what made it real. The thing Nadir handed over was not something he had invented: it was the Bagratid kingship, a lineage and an office with a thousand years of its own warrant behind it, confirmed by the Georgian church in its own cathedral by its own rite. Nadir was not the source of that title. He was, at most, the removal of an obstacle to it. Which is exactly why it created no defenders: within two years the two kings had withdrawn their loyalty; Nadir dispatched thirty thousand troops against them; and on his death they expelled every Persian garrison in the country, including from Tbilisi, and asserted an independence eastern Georgia had not held in three centuries.

The one time he conveyed something that stuck, it stuck because the warrant behind it was not his — and the grantees used it against him inside twenty-four months. That is not a counter-example to the module's finding. It is the finding stated from the other end.

So the audit's answer, at every link from his own nephew down to the village tax collector, is the same. *Would this man be worse off if the arrangement fell?* No — and in a great many cases he would be better off, provided only that Nadir was dead. That condition is the whole of the Afsharid political system.

The last year

The revealed-preference test asks what an apex who already holds uncontested force will nonetheless pay a real, avoidable price for. The answer here is dated, and it comes at the very end.

In the last year of his reign, Nadir decreed the resumption of the pious foundations.

He had suspended them a decade earlier as a deliberate act of state, taken their revenues into his own registers, and killed the man who headed the class that lived on them. And in 1746–47, with revolts spreading, the treasury structurally unable to meet the army's bill, and the country in the condition that would produce his murder, he began giving them back. He did not need to. The force was still entirely his; no faction could compel him; the Ottomans had just made peace on his terms. He gave the endowments back because he had run out of anything else to give, and because by then he had grasped what the confiscation had cost him: not revenue, which it had produced in quantity, but the only class in Iran that had ever been capable of telling the country that a ruler was rightful.

It was too late by roughly a decade, and it is very doubtful that it could have worked at any date, for the reason the next section sets out. But the reversal should be read for

what the framework says a costly, avoidable, late expenditure always means: it is the apex conceding, in his conduct rather than his words, that the thing he had dispensed with was not dispensable.

Why a man without a warrant pays cash

Here the module's finding joins the one that opened this study, and the join is the point.

It would be easy, and wrong, to read all of this as a mistake — as a soldier who understood armies and not states, who failed to see that grants build loyalty. The record does not support that reading. Nadir understood the mechanism perfectly well; he had grown up inside a country made of it, and he took a survey before he dismantled it. What he was doing was a choice, and from inside his position it was a defensible one.

Consider what a grant from Nadir would actually have been worth. A settlement works because the grantee holds his position by a title the granter did not invent and cannot casually revoke — a title with a warrant behind it that outlives the man who conferred it. Nadir had no such warrant. He was an Afshar herdsman's son who had ruled for a decade as the declared slave of a Safavid, deposed one Safavid and then an infant Safavid, and taken the throne by an assembly whose consent everybody present understood to be arranged. The currency of legitimacy current in Iran was descent from the Seventh Imam, and he did not have it and could not acquire it. So a heritable estate granted by Nadir would have been held on Nadir's warrant — which is to say, on nothing beyond his continued ability to enforce it, and worth precisely as much as his life expectancy.

Now put yourself in the position of a khan being offered such a grant. You know that the day a credible Safavid appears, or the day this man dies, your title reverts to being a piece of paper signed by a usurper. You would therefore price it low, take it, and keep your options open — which is exactly what a settlement is designed to prevent, and exactly what Nadir's officers in fact did.

And put yourself in Nadir's chair. Granting heritable estates to men whose loyalty you cannot secure by the grant does not buy you defenders; it manufactures **independently endowed rivals** — men with a landed base, armed followings, and no reason to prefer you to the next claimant. Given that he could not make the grant bind, refusing to grant at all was not stupidity. It was the correct move on the position as it stood. Cash conveys no independence; a salary makes a man come back next month; a wage is the only medium in which a ruler with no warrant can safely pay.

That is the mechanism, and it should be stated plainly because it is the hinge of the whole study: **the inability to convey title and the refusal to distribute wealth are**

not two failings but one. A ruler who cannot own cannot make owners, and knowing this, he rationally declines to try — which forecloses the settlement, which forecloses the default, which guarantees that the arrangement's life expectancy equals his own. The trap closes from the inside, and every step in it is sensible.

Reading the settlement against the framework

Three things this case gives back to the framework, and one caution.

First, a conversion the card does not yet name. The card treats the settlement's characteristic technology as the conversion of relations into things — the statute that turns office, lineage right or collective patrimony into a transferable estate, which binds a coordinating class by re-sourcing its title. Afsharid Iran runs the identical technology in reverse, and the reverse deserves a name of its own: **the conversion of things into flows.** A cadastral survey, a suspension of inalienable endowment, a register in the fiscal department, a salary in place of an assignment — the instruments are as legal and as deliberate as any charter, and their effect is the exact opposite. They dissolve holdings into revenue and holders into employees. Where the first conversion manufactures a class with something to lose, the second guarantees there is nothing to lose. Both are settlements in the technical sense that both determine who holds what; only one of them produces a default. The corpus should look for the reverse conversion wherever it finds a ruler with maximal force and minimal legitimacy, because the two conditions plausibly select for it.

Second, the settlement is not merely an expense — it is a transfer of power, and a ruler may rationally refuse it. The framework has tended to treat the absence of a settlement as something an order failed to afford or failed to get round to. This case shows a third possibility and probably the more common one: an apex who declines to settle because settling would create people he cannot control. Making men owners makes them independent, and independence is only safe for a ruler whose title is secure enough that the owners' interest runs with his. Where the ruler's own title is contested, the same grant that would bind a subordinate to a legitimate dynasty instead endows a future rival. So the two variables interact, and the card should say so: **the capacity to make a settlement is downstream of possessing a warrant, and a usurper is therefore structurally driven toward the arrangement that cannot outlive him.** This is why so many spectacular conquerors leave nothing. Not because they were soldiers rather than statesmen, but because the position that produces a spectacular conqueror — an outsider rising fast in a vacuum — is the same position that makes his grants worthless and his prudence fatal.

Third, a diagnostic that travels. The card asks, of every co-optation, what consideration was demanded in return and whether the grantees kept armed capacity. This case suggests a prior test that is cheaper to run and more decisive: **ask what the grantee's title would be worth on the day the granter died.** Where the answer is "the same," a settlement exists. Where the answer is "nothing," what exists is a payroll, however grand the titles. The Georgian kings are the control that makes the test legible: their crowns were worth as much after 1747 as before, because the warrant behind them was Bagratid and ecclesiastical rather than Afsharid — and they were, accordingly, the only men in the empire holding a position that survived their patron, and the first to leave.

And the caution. It would be a cheap ending to write this up as avarice — the hoarder at Kalat, the miser who would not share. The evidence does not read that way. He paid his army well and on time for most of the reign, remitted taxation across the whole country when the Indian treasure came home, distributed spoils and gratuities generously, and gave his son a province and an army at seventeen when the dynasty he replaced would have given him a locked room. What he would not do was let anyone hold anything *by right*. The distinction between generosity and settlement is the entire content of this module, and it is the reason a man who gave away enormous quantities of wealth ended with nobody in his empire who had a reason to want him to live — including his nephew, his officers, and the treasurer who took the Koh-i-Noor east and became a king.

A note on sources

The reconstruction of Nadir's fiscal and tenurial policy rests on Ann K. S. Lambton's *Landlord and Peasant in Persia* (Oxford, 1953), pp. 129–33, and her essay "The Tribal Resurgence and the Decline of the Bureaucracy in the Eighteenth Century," in Naff and Owen, eds., *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Islamic History* (Carbondale, 1977), as those are summarised and cited in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* articles on Nader Shah and on the economy from the Safavids through the Zands: specifically the cadastral survey and the land registers known as *raqabat-e Naderi*; the confiscation of *waqf* property and its incorporation under that head under the administration of the *divan*; the suspension of the Safavid framework of pious foundations following the establishment of the Ja'fari *madhhab*; the decree resuming the pious foundations in the last year of the reign; the discontinuation of the Safavid silver *abbasi* and the minting of the silver *Naderi* on the Mughal rupee standard (following Rabino di Borgomale); and the statement that Nadir attempted to promote fixed salaries for soldiers and officials in place of revenues derived from land tenure.

Mansur Sefatgol's work on endowments under the Afsharids and Michael Axworthy's *The Sword of Persia* are the further authorities for the confiscation; Axworthy is also the source for the Bakhtiari campaign against Ali Morad and the deportation of families to Khorasan, and John Perry's "Forced Migration in Iran during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries" (*Iranian Studies* 8:4, 1975) for the resettlement policy in general. All of this modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited, not quoted at length.

Primary quotation in this module is limited to Jonas Hanway's *An Historical Account of the British Trade over the Caspian Sea* (London, 1753), vol. II, a public-domain and well-informed but second-hand and hostile contemporary, for the payment of arrears with an added gratuity to induce the men to declare their plunder, the legend of the coin struck for the occasion, and the removal of the treasure to Kalat under a guard of his best troops.

Dates and events in the audit follow the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* and the standard accounts: the coronation and the proclamation of the Ja'fari *madhhab* on 8 March 1736; the killing of the *mullabashi* Mirza Abu'l-Hasan in February 1736 (his reported remark that "everyone is for the Safavid dynasty" is preserved through Lockhart and is a report of speech rather than a documented text, and is treated as such); the appointment of Reza Qoli as governor of Khorasan in 1736 and his blinding in 1742; the rebellion of Mohammad Taqi Khan Shirazi from January 1744 and its suppression, whose reported details of mutilation come from hostile and later accounts and should be read with that in mind; the revolt of Ali Qoli two months before the assassination of June 1747 and his subsequent killing of Nadir's sons and grandsons except Shahrokh; and the departure of Ahmad Khan Abdali with the Afghan contingent. The Georgian material follows the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* article on Erekle II and the standard Georgian sources: service in the Indian campaign, the suppression of the Georgian revolt of 1743, the grant of Kartli to Teimuraz and Kakheti to Erekle in 1744, the marriage of Ali Qoli to Teimuraz's daughter Ketevan, the coronation of both kings by Christian rite at Svetitskhoveli in Mtskheta on 1 October 1745 — the first such since 1632 — and the expulsion of the Persian garrisons after 1747. Nadir's decree to the merchants of Agulis (Matenadaran, folder 1g, doc. 1288, issued between December 1742 and January 1743) is cited from the published description of the document by Kostikyan and Margaryan; it is not quoted here, since the text reaches the reader only through a modern edition and translation.

Figures are given as ranges or as reported where the record disagrees, and where a detail rests on a single hostile witness that is stated. No quotation, date, attribution or figure has been reconstructed from memory. The audience question raised by the Ja'fari

madhhab, the extraction rates of the 1740s, and the mechanics of the collapse are examined elsewhere in this study, where the evidence for each can be set out at proper length.

THE SERVANT OF THE EIGHT AND FOUR

Module 3 · The Robe — a legitimating claim reconstructed audience by audience, and the eleven-year revealed-preference test of a man with uncontested force who spent a decade of diplomacy chasing a currency only a rival sovereign could mint

What he wore on his seal in 1732

In June 1732, four years before he took the throne, Nadr Qoli — then still Tahmasp Qoli, the declared servant of a Safavid — endowed a pious foundation at the shrine of the Eighth Imam at Mashhad to commemorate his victory over the Abdali Afghans. The deed survives, and on it is his personal seal, and the seal carries a couplet:

> *Lā fatā illā ʿAli lā sayf illā Ḏu'l-Faqār / Nāder-e ʿaṣr-am ze lotf-e Ḥaqq ḡolām-e hašt o čār*
> *"There is no youth but Ali, no sword but Dhu'l-Faqar / I am the rarity of the age, and by the grace of God the servant of the Eight and the Four."*

The Eight and the Four are the Twelve Imams. The opening line is the great Shi'i battle-formula. There is nothing remarkable about any of it; that is the point. In 1732 the most formidable soldier in Asia carried on his own seal an entirely conventional profession of Twelver devotion, and endowed a *waqf* at the greatest Shi'i shrine in Iran, and put the whole thing in writing.

Four years later he abolished the formula, suspended the endowments, and spent the remaining eleven years of his life attempting to have Twelver Shi'ism reclassified as a school of Sunni law. This module is about what happened in between, and about what the record can and cannot tell us about why. The discipline that governs it is that a person's professed values must be read from evidence laid down *before* the act rather than inferred backward from it — which is exactly what the seal of 1732 supplies, and what makes this case unusually legible.

Mughan: an election with one candidate

In February 1736, having cleared the Afghans out of Iran, driven the Ottomans back, and obtained Russian withdrawal from the Caspian provinces by treaty, Nadir

assembled the nomadic and sedentary leaders of the realm — army commanders, provincial governors, tribal khans, ulama — on the Mughan steppe, and put a question to them. They were to choose: himself, or one of the Safavids.

Everyone present understood the form of the question. The reigning shah was Abbas III, aged four, whom Nadir had installed as an infant after deposing his father. The proposer of the alternatives commanded the only army in the country and was encamped around the assembly with it. Astarabadi, writing officially, called the gathering a *quriltay*, the steppe conclave that chose khans — a word that flatters the proceedings with the memory of Chinggisid and Timurid practice, and which is itself part of the claim being constructed.

One man is recorded as having answered the question honestly. The *mullabashi*, Mirza Abu'l-Hasan — the head of the entire Shi'i religious establishment, in an office created by the last Safavid shah — was reported to have remarked that everyone was for the Safavid dynasty. He was arrested and strangled, and the report of the remark and its consequence comes through Lockhart from the chronicle tradition rather than from a document, and should be held as a report of speech rather than an established text. But whatever its precise wording, the sequence is not in doubt: the head of the interpreter class said the thing everybody knew, and was killed for saying it, at the assembly convened to establish that it was not true.

After several days the assembly proclaimed Nadir the legitimate monarch. He then made a speech setting his terms. His subjects would abandon practices introduced by Shah Ismail which had, he said, plunged Iran into disorder — above all *sabb*, the ritual cursing of the first three caliphs, and *rafd*, the denial of their right to have led the community. Twelver Shi'ism would henceforth be known as the *madhhab-i Ja'fari*, after the Sixth Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, and would be treated exactly as the four recognised legal schools of Sunni Islam were treated. Everyone present was required to sign a document indicating agreement. He was crowned on 8 March 1736.

The four peaks and the twelve gores

One of his first acts as shah was to change what men wore on their heads, and it is the most compact statement of the whole programme.

The Qizilbash *taj* — the cap that had given the Safavid movement its name, worn for two and a quarter centuries — was pieced with twelve gores for the Twelve Imams. Nadir replaced it with a four-peaked hat, the *kolah-e Naderi*, the four peaks implicitly honouring the four Rightly-Guided Caliphs whom Shi'i practice had spent two centuries cursing.

Consider what that does. It puts the doctrinal revision on the head of every soldier in the army, visible at a hundred paces, requiring no literacy and no sermon. It is the cheapest possible broadcast of a claim, and it is aimed simultaneously at the man wearing it, at the population he rides past, and at any Ottoman or Uzbek who sees the column go by. It also does something a decree cannot: it makes the wearer complicit. A man in a four-peaked cap has, whatever he privately believes, publicly stopped being a Qizilbash.

The robe for the Ottomans

Now the audiences, taken separately, because they were addressed separately and in different terms — and the differences are the evidence.

The first and by far the most heavily worked audience was the Ottoman sultan. Just before the coronation, Nadir set out five conditions for peace, and the list is the clearest statement of what he actually wanted. They were: that the Ja'fari *madhhab* be recognised as a fifth orthodox legal school of Sunni Islam; that an official place — a *rukn*, a pillar — be designated for a Ja'fari imam in the courtyard of the Ka'ba, analogous to those of the four Sunni schools; that a Persian *amir al-hajj* be appointed to lead the Iranian pilgrimage caravan on equal footing with those of Damascus and Cairo; that permanent ambassadors be exchanged; and that prisoners of war be exchanged and their sale prohibited. In return he undertook to prohibit the Shi'i practices the Ottomans found intolerable.

Look at the order. The two religious demands come first, and they are the two he never obtained. The three procedural demands come after, and they were granted. Ten years of war and diplomacy were spent on the first two.

And notice what kind of thing the first two are. A pillar in the Ka'ba is not a piece of territory, a fortress, a trade concession or a tax. It is a *place in a scheme of recognition* that only the custodian of the Two Holy Places could confer, and the custodian was the Ottoman sultan. Nadir was asking the sultan to mint a coin, and the sultan was the only mint. There is no army in the world that can take a *rukn* by storm.

This is the revealed-preference test running under laboratory conditions, and it should be stated as plainly as the evidence allows. Here is an apex with entirely uncontested force inside his own realm, who has beaten the party he is negotiating with in the field repeatedly, and who nonetheless spends a decade of embassies, a war, and eventually the abandonment of territorial claims in pursuit of a religious recognition that would change nothing about his ability to tax, conscript, imprison or execute a single one of his subjects. The framework's rule is that when an apex who already holds the force pays a real and avoidable price for legitimacy he does not structurally need, the

expenditure itself is the evidence that some audience required it. The price here was paid over eleven years and it was enormous. Something in his position made that recognition worth a war.

The robe for the Mughals and the Uzbeks

To the east he ran a second claim, and it was genealogical rather than doctrinal: that he, the Ottomans, the Uzbeks and the Mughals shared a **common Turkmen descent**, and that this shared lineage was the proper basis for their relations. He put it in the letters that carried the Ja'fari proposal to Istanbul, and he put it in official documents generally.

It is a claim that repays a moment's attention, because it is doing something quite precise. Nadir was an Afshar, of the twenty-four Oghuz tribes — genuinely Turkmen, and this is one of the few things about his origins he did not have to invent. The Ottomans were of Oghuz descent; the Uzbek khans were of the steppe. The Mughals were not Turkmen in that sense at all, being Timurids, and Nadir addressed the Mughal emperor as a Turkmen ruler anyway, which quietly extended the word to cover Timur's descendants. The 1739 peace with Muhammad Shah proclaimed the Mughal's legitimacy explicitly by citing the Turkmen lineage he shared with Nadir — and Nadir then staged a ceremony in which he replaced the crown on the defeated emperor's head, and assumed for himself the title *shahanshah*.

What is being built here is a **peer group**. If sovereignty runs in a shared Turkmen descent, then Nadir belongs to the same family of legitimate rulers as the sultan in Istanbul and the emperor in Delhi, and the question of whether he descends from the Seventh Imam does not arise, because that is not the relevant criterion. He had found a currency in which he was solvent. The Timurid connection was worked in the same direction: he named his grandson, born in March 1734, Shahrokh, after Timur's son; he had his chroniclers present his defeat of the Mughals as an echo of Timur's; and he based his claim to Iraq on Timur's earlier control of the province. On the coins struck at his Indian mints he carried Timur's own title:

> *hast sulṭān bar salāṭīn-i jahān / shāh-i shāhān Nādir-i ṣāḥib-qirān*
> *"Over the sultans of the world is a sultan / Shah of Shahs, Nadir, Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction."*

Sahib-qiran, Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction, is the Timurid title. It is a claim of cosmic timing rather than of blood, which is precisely why it was available to a man with no blood.

The robe for his own army

There is a third audience and it is the one inside the tent. Nadir's army was, by the 1740s, very substantially Sunni: Abdali and Ghilzai Afghans absorbed after Herat and Kandahar, Uzbeks taken in at Khiva, Kurds, Baluch, Sunni Turkmen. His own core was Shi'i — Afshar and Qajar. A Shi'i state religion that required the public cursing of Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman is not a neutral background condition for a force composed like that; it is a daily insult administered by the state to a large fraction of its own soldiers.

The Ja'fari settlement removes the insult without requiring anybody to convert. It is, read from this angle, a piece of unit cohesion policy, and a shrewd one. When Nadir visited the tomb of Abu Hanifa during the Iraq campaign of 1743, the gesture was legible to the Ottomans and to his own Sunni contingents at once.

The framework warns against reading two inconsistent claims as cynicism before checking whether two audiences are being paid in two different coins. Here there are three coins and they are not inconsistent at all — they interlock. A reformed Shi'ism acceptable to Sunnis makes peace with the Ottomans possible, makes his own army coherent, and dissolves the Safavid dynastic claim, all with a single instrument. As with Hideyoshi's invasion of Korea, the move that gets chosen is very often the one that solves the most problems at once, and the number of problems it solved is much of the explanation for why he would not let it go.

The robe for Iran — and what it does not say

Now the audience the framework expects to be primary, and here the case is startling.

Toward his own subjects the claim was pitched dramatically lower. In a proclamation sent to the ulama of Isfahan shortly after the coronation, the Ja'fari *madhhab* is presented as nothing more than an attempt to keep the peace between Sunnis and Shi'is. Ali will continue to be venerated as one especially beloved of God. The formula *ʿAli wali Allāh* — Ali is the friend and deputy of God — is prohibited, and that is the operative clause, since it was the formula on Safavid coinage and in the Safavid call to prayer.

And then the detail that does more work than anything else in this module: **in contrast to the letters he sent to foreign rulers, the domestic proclamation does not mention the Safavids at all.**

Abroad, he explained himself in relation to the dynasty he had replaced. At home, the dynasty was not named — because naming it would have raised the question the

whole apparatus existed to prevent anybody from asking. This is a seam, and it runs between the inside and the outside of his own realm, and it was policed by omission rather than by censorship.

The same modesty runs through everything the ordinary subject could actually see. The distich on one of his official seals after 1736 reads:

> *Besmellāh – nagin-e dawlat-e din rafta bud čun az jā / be-nām-e Nāder Irān qarār dād Ḵodā*
> *"In the name of God — when the seal of state and religion had gone from its place / God gave order to Iran in the name of Nadir."*

That is a claim to have restored order, conferred by God, and nothing more. No descent. No Imams. No sacred office. And the coinage says the same: the silver struck at Isfahan in 1148 carries

> *sikka bar zarr kard nām-i salṭanat rā dar jahān / Nādir-i Irān-zamīn va ḵusraw-i gītī-sitān*
> *"He struck upon gold the name of sovereignty in the world / Nadir of the land of Iran, and the world-seizing king."*

Set that beside what Safavid coins had carried — the confession of faith, *ʿAli wali Allāh*, and the names of the Twelve Imams around the margin — and the substitution is exact and public. Sacred lineage out; sovereignty, conquest and the restoration of order in. A man could hold the two coins in one hand and read the whole political revolution off them.

The refusal, dated

The Ottomans said no, and they went on saying no for a decade, and the record of the refusals is the spine of the case.

At the 1736 negotiations the sultan's people conceded the *amir al-hajj*, the exchange of ambassadors and the exchange of prisoners, and refused the *madhhab* and the *rukn*; the document both sides signed mentioned only the three procedural points. In 1741 Nadir sent another embassy resubmitting the 1736 proposal. Mahmud I had just concluded successful wars against Russia and Austria and was in no need of accommodation; he rejected the claim to Iraq, and the *shaykh al-Islam* — the Ottoman empire's own supreme legal authority — issued a *fatwa* formally declaring the Ja'fari *madhhab* heretical.

That is the mint refusing to strike, in writing, from the only office in Sunni Islam whose refusal was decisive. And it is worth pausing on why the Ottomans could not have done otherwise. The sultan's own claim rested substantially on being the protector of Sunni orthodoxy and the custodian of the Two Holy Places. Recognising a fifth school, invented by an Iranian usurper, and installing its imam at the Ka'ba, would have cost him a portion of exactly the thing Nadir was asking him to lend. The refusal was not stubbornness or contempt. It was the same arithmetic Nadir was running, from the other chair.

Najaf, 1743: a ratification with nobody to ratify it

Nadir's response was to try to manufacture the recognition himself, and the attempt is the most revealing thing he ever did.

He invaded Ottoman Iraq in 1743, besieged Kirkuk, Erbil and Mosul without result, and in December signed a ceasefire with Ahmad Pasha, the Ottoman governor of Baghdad. He then convened, at the shrine of Ali at Najaf, a council of ulama drawn from Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia, to debate and settle the question of the Ja'fari *madhhab*. We have two accounts: one by Astarabadi, his own historiographer, and one by Abdullah al-Suwaydi, the Sunni scholar from Baghdad who attended on the Ottoman side and wrote it up. Al-Suwaydi lists the participants, and the composition is itself the finding: of the delegates from Iran, exactly one — Sayyid Ahmad of Ardalan, a Shafi'i — was a Sunni.

After several days of genuinely lively debate, the participants signed a document recognising the Ja'fari *madhhab* as a legitimate legal school of Sunni Islam.

And nothing happened. The sultan was unimpressed. An Ottoman envoy reported that Mahmud I had verbally authorised the governor of Baghdad to conclude a peace, without any congress; the Porte regarded the whole proceeding as a political formality. The Ottoman position was that the Iranians were dissembling and that the Ja'fari school was a Rafidi sect and illegitimate.

The framework's account of legitimacy is that it is borrowed and never minted, because a currency is only current where the audience already agrees to honour it. Najaf is the experiment that isolates the variable. Nadir assembled the scholars, staged the debate, obtained the signatures, and produced a document formally granting him the thing he wanted — and it was worth nothing, because the audience whose recognition he needed had not been in the room and did not care what the room had decided. He had printed the note himself. A note printed by the borrower is not money.

Kordan, 1746: what he dropped

The end of it is dated too. After a further Ottoman war and a victory at Baghavard near Yerevan in August 1745, Nadir came to terms — from a position weakened not by the Ottomans but by the revolts spreading across his own country. In the settlement signed at Kordan north-west of Tehran in September 1746, he **dropped the demand for recognition of the Ja'fari *madhhab*** along with his territorial claims. What remained was the old, long-agreed Ottoman-Safavid furniture: frontiers on the 1639 line, protection of pilgrims, treatment of prisoners, exchange of ambassadors. The agreement recognised the shared Turkmen lineage, and it ostensibly proclaimed the conversion of Iran to Sunnism.

That last clause is a fiction and the treaty itself gives it away, because the same instrument had to guarantee the safety of Iranian pilgrims travelling to the Shi'i shrines of Iraq. A country that had converted to Sunnism would not need that clause. Both parties signed a document declaring a thing that both parties' other clauses assumed to be false, which is what a face-saving formula looks like when you catch it in the act.

The treaty did secure formal Ottoman recognition of Nadir's rule, and in the spring of 1747 the sultan dispatched an embassy to Iran with a great quantity of gifts. Nadir was killed in June, and did not live to receive it. The recognition arrived ten years late, stripped of the only clause he had actually wanted, addressed to a dead man.

Provenance, testing, sincerity

Three of the framework's diagnostics close the module.

On provenance — forged, redirected, or inherited? This is an attempted **forge**, and one of the most explicit in the record. He did not get behind an existing trusted channel and point it at himself; he had just killed the head of it. He did not step into a vacancy and inherit a monopoly; the Safavid claim was alive and had outlived the Safavid state. He tried to bring into existence a new currency of legitimacy — a Shi'ism reclassified as a Sunni school, and a sovereignty grounded in Turkmen descent and Timurid conjunction rather than Imami blood — and to have it honoured. The card says forging is the expensive option that a sharp audience may catch. This case specifies the point further, and the specification is the module's contribution, stated in the closing section below.

On tested versus revealed. The Ja'fari doctrine is unusual among robes in that it made a checkable claim: that Sunni authority would accept it. That claim was tested five or six times over a decade, failed every time, was formally condemned by *fatwa*, and was eventually abandoned by its own author in a signed treaty. Most robes are insulated

from their own results; this one was not, and its author behaved toward it more like a man running an experiment than a man defending a faith. That is itself a finding about what kind of object it was.

On sincerity. The framework's rule is that sincerity at the apex is unrecoverable and only the deviation test may be applied, probabilistically. Run it. The evidence laid down before the act — the seal of 1732, the *waqf* at Mashhad, the name he gave his eldest son after the Eighth Imam — is a conventional Twelver. The deviation, when it comes in 1736, runs unambiguously toward his own advantage: it dissolves the claim of the dynasty he had displaced, it makes peace with the empire he could not permanently defeat, it harmonises an army he could not otherwise hold together, and it supplies the legal warrant for confiscating the largest pool of protected wealth in the country. A deviation that pays on four accounts at once reads as instrument rather than conviction, and the reading is supported — though not proved — by the testimony of Père Louis Bazin, the French Jesuit who served as his personal physician in the last years, who reported that it was hard to tell what religion the shah followed and that those who knew him best said he had none.

Two cautions on that. Bazin is one hostile-ish witness reporting hearsay about a dying man; and the framework insists that sincere belief and strategic use are not mutually exclusive, so "instrument" does not establish "disbelief." The honest formulation is that the deviation test returns *instrument* with reasonable confidence, that the man's inward state is not recoverable, and that it does not much matter — because the robe's failure had nothing to do with whether he meant it.

Reading the robe against the framework

The framework says legitimacy is always borrowed, never minted, because a currency is only current where the audience already honours it. Afsharid Iran confirms that and adds a hard edge to it that the corpus should carry.

The refinement is about where the mint is. The card treats forging as the expensive provenance — expensive because a vigilant audience may catch the counterfeit. This case shows a worse condition than expense, and one that a conqueror can walk into without noticing. Ask, of any forged claim, **who would have to be the one to honour it, and what would honouring it cost them.** Where the needed recogniser is a diffuse population, forging is expensive but possible: you can wear the audience down over generations with formation, and the Safavids did exactly that with a genealogy their own contemporaries could see was unprovable. But where the needed recogniser is **a single rival sovereign whose own legitimacy is constituted by not granting it**, forging is not expensive. It is structurally impossible, and no quantity of

force will change that, because the thing you need him to do is precisely the thing that would cost him what he has. Nadir could have taken Baghdad, Mosul and Basra together and been no closer to a *rukn* in the Ka'ba, since the pillar's value depended entirely on its being conceded rather than seized. **A currency of legitimacy whose only mint belongs to your enemy cannot be obtained by defeating him** — and an apex in that position is not facing a hard problem but an insoluble one, which is a distinction worth having, because it changes how his eleven years of effort should be read. He was not failing to solve it. There was nothing there to solve.

A second refinement, on the seam. The colonial cases in this corpus produced a seam running between metropole and colony, policed to keep the home audience from seeing what the floor was doing. This case has a seam of a different geometry: it runs between the **inside and the outside of a single realm**, and it is maintained not by censorship but by *differential silence*. Abroad, Nadir explained his relation to the Safavids at length, because abroad the question was diplomatic. At home the proclamation did not mention them, because at home the question was fatal. The corpus should hold this as a distinct form: **a seam maintained by what is omitted from the domestic version rather than by what is suppressed from the foreign one** — and note the diagnostic, which is cheap to run. Where an apex addresses two audiences, compare the two texts for what appears in one and is absent from the other. The absence marks the thing he cannot afford to have raised.

And a note on the base, which is where the whole apparatus failed. The framework asks what the population actually *did* when the order made a legitimacy determination, as the strongest available evidence of whether formation produced conviction or performance. Here the determination was made repeatedly and enforced with threats: everyone at Mughan signed; a decree required all Iranians to abide by it; letters went to religious officials warning that those who did not comply with the Ja'fari usage would be punished; communities that resisted the edict were savagely dealt with. And it did not take. The cursing went underground and came back. The four-peaked cap disappeared with the man who introduced it. Within a few years of his death the *madhhab-i Ja'fari* existed only as a name in the treaty archives, and Iran was exactly as Twelver as it had been in 1735.

That is the two-century conquest holding its ground against the eleven-year one, and it is the clearest demonstration this corpus has of the asymmetry the framework describes between an order run at the cheap pole and one run at the expensive pole. Ismail imposed Shi'ism at sword-point on a Sunni country and it took, because two hundred years of parish-level formation were available to drive it down until it was simply what the world was. Nadir attempted the reverse operation with more force,

better organisation and a far more coherent argument, and had eleven years, and it did not take at all, because a decree is not formation and a cap is not a childhood.

The last word on it belongs to the man's own family, and it is exact. Nadir's grandson Shahrokh — born in 1734 to Reza Qoli and to Fatema Sultan Begum, a Safavid princess and sister of the shah Nadir had deposed — was blinded as a boy, spared in the massacre of Nadir's line, and ruled at Mashhad for nearly fifty years. He survived when every one of Nadir's sons was killed, and the reason his contemporaries gave was that his Safavid blood might yet be of use. The man who spent eleven years trying to make descent from the Seventh Imam irrelevant left one descendant on a throne, and that descendant held it on the strength of exactly the warrant his grandfather had spent his reign trying to abolish.

A note on sources

The reconstruction here follows Ernest Tucker's work — "Nadir Shah and the Ja'fari *Madhhab* Reconsidered" (*Iranian Studies* 27, 1994), "The Peace Negotiations of 1736" (*Turkish Studies Association Bulletin* 20/1, 1996), and *Nadir Shah's Quest for Legitimacy in Post-Safavid Iran* (Gainesville, 2006) — together with his article on Nader Shah in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, from which the following load-bearing specifics are drawn and to which they are credited: the *waqf* deed of June 1732 at the Imam Reza shrine and the couplet on Nadir's personal seal preserved on it (as given by Sha'bani and Rabino); the Mughan assembly of February 1736, the reported remark of the *mullabashi* Mirza Abu'l-Hasan and his strangling (reported through Lockhart, and treated in the text as a report of speech rather than a documented text); the accession speech, the abolition of *sabb* and *rafd*, and the requirement that all present sign; the five conditions for peace specified before the coronation of 8 March 1736 (Astarabadi, p. 286); the *kolah-e Naderi* with four peaks replacing the twelve-gored Qizilbash *taj*; the letters to Mahmud I invoking common Turkmen origins; the proclamation to the ulama of Isfahan prohibiting *ʿAli wali Allāh*, retaining the veneration of Ali, and — the point on which this module turns — not mentioning the Safavids at all, in contrast to the letters sent abroad (Qoddusi, p. 540); the distich on the official seal after 1736 (Rabino, p. 52); the 1739 treaty proclaiming Muhammad Shah's legitimacy by shared Turkmen lineage, the replacement of the crown, and Nadir's assumption of *shahanshah*; the naming of Shahrokh after Shahrokh b. Timur and his birth in March 1734 to Reza Qoli and Fatema Sultan Begum; the 1741 embassy, the rejection of the Iraq claim, and the *shaykh al-Islam*'s *fatwa* declaring the Ja'fari *madhhab* heretical; the Najaf council of 1743 and the signed document; the treaty of Kordan of September 1746, the dropping of the *madhhab* demand and the territorial claims, the recognition

of shared Turkmen lineage, the ostensible proclamation of Iran's conversion to Sunnism, and the guarantee of safe passage for pilgrims to the Shi'i shrines that reveals its formal character; and the Ottoman embassy dispatched in spring 1747 that arrived after Nadir's death.

The two accounts of the Najaf council are Astarabadi's and that of Abdullah b. Husayn al-Suwaydi, *al-Hujaj al-qat'iyya li-ittifaq al-firaq al-Islamiyya*, the eyewitness record of the Sunni scholar sent from Baghdad; the detail that only one Iranian participant, Sayyid Ahmad of Ardalan, was a Sunni, and that he was a Shafi'i like al-Suwaydi, is from al-Suwaydi's list of participants as reported by Tucker. Neither account is quoted here, since both reach the reader only through modern editions and translations. The coin legends of the Isfahan issue of 1148 and of the Indian mints are given in the transliterations published in the numismatic literature and reproduced in the secondary discussion of Nadir's coinage, and the Safavid practice of carrying *ʿAli wali Allāh* with the names of the Twelve Imams is the standard description of Safavid issues. Père Louis Bazin's remark on Nadir's religion, published in the *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, is reported here as it is transmitted in the modern literature rather than quoted from the original.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited throughout, not quoted at length; Lockhart's *Nadir Shah* (1938) and Michael Axworthy's *The Sword of Persia* are the further authorities used. Where a claim rests on a single witness, or reaches the reader only through a chronicler with an interest, that is stated at the point of use. No quotation, date, attribution or figure has been reconstructed from memory. The confiscation of the endowments that the Ja'fari settlement licensed is treated at length elsewhere in this study, as are the formation question, the suppression of dissent, and the assassination of 1747.

THE SCHOOL WITH NO SCHOOLS

Module 4 · Formation — a ruler who ran the first half of Ismail's programme and inverted the second, because the instrument that installs a belief in a population is the same instrument that makes owners of the men who teach it

What Ismail actually built

Nadir was doing what Ismail had done. That is not an interpretive stretch; the parallel is close enough to be exact, and it was surely visible to him, since the Safavid conquest was the only working example of the operation in his own country's memory. A man with an army arrives, finds a religious order in possession, kills the men who hold it, forbids the practices that identify it, and installs a new definition of the faith by decree.

So the useful thing is to lay the two operations side by side and see what is missing from the second, because what is missing is the whole subject of this module.

Ismail's programme, run from 1501, had two halves. The first was destruction, and Nadir matched it almost move for move: Sunni ulama who would not recant were killed, exiled or forced to recant; the names of the first three caliphs were struck out of the sermon; a practice of public identification — the ritual cursing, *tabarra* — was imposed as a spoken oath of submission, and refusal could cost a man his life.

The second half is the one that mattered, and it took two hundred years. Ismail and his successors **imported a class of trained interpreters** — Twelver jurists from Jabal Amil and Bahrayn, of whom Ali al-Karaki, who joined the court around 1508 and was made shaykh al-Islam at Tabriz, is the emblem — because the Qizilbash could supply devotion but not jurisprudence, and a state that has just made a minority legal tradition official needs men who can actually run it. They **created offices** for that class to occupy and be promoted through: the *sadr*, administrator of endowments and chief officer of the religious courts, later split in two; a *shaykh al-Islam* in each major city; and finally, under the last Safavid shah, a *mullabashi* at the head of the whole establishment. They **funded it in perpetuity**, endowing shrines, mosques and madrasas as *waqf* — property alienated permanently and inalienably to a purpose, which is the only form of holding in Islamic law that no future ruler can resume. They **licensed enforcers**, the *tabarra'iyan*, who reported those keeping Sunni observance in private. They **scored the year**: Ashura, the Muharram mourning, the pilgrimage cycle to Mashhad and

Qom, the life-cycle rites, the whole calendar rehearsing the same account of who was wronged and who is rightful. And then they waited, while children who had never known anything else grew up and had children who had never known anything else, until a poor Turkmen herdsman in the mountains north of Mashhad named his son Emam Qoli, *slave of the Imam*, without any sense that he was expressing an opinion.

That is what a formation is. It is not a doctrine; it is a *funded institution that reproduces a doctrine across generations, and outlives everybody who built it.*

The half Nadir ran

Against that, set what happened between 1736 and 1747.

He killed the man in possession: the *mullabashi* Mirza Abu'l-Hasan, head of the entire religious establishment, strangled in February 1736 after remarking that everyone was for the Safavid dynasty. He forbade the identifying practices: *sabb*, the ritual cursing, and *rafd*, the denial of the first three caliphs' right to have led the community, both abolished at Mughan; the formula *ʿAli wali Allāh* prohibited by proclamation, and with it the Safavid coin legend and the Safavid call to prayer. He issued edicts in June and July 1736 restricting Shi'i ritual. He decreed the new definition — Twelver Shi'ism reclassified as the *madhhab-i Ja'fari*, a school of law within Sunni Islam. He required everyone present at Mughan to sign a document agreeing, sent letters to religious officials across the country warning that those who did not comply with the Ja'fari usage would be punished, and dealt savagely with communities that resisted the edict. He changed the headgear, replacing the twelve-gored Qizilbash *taj* with the four-peaked *kolah-e Naderi*.

Every one of those is a move from Ismail's first half. Not one of them is from the second.

The half he could not run

And on the second half, the record is not silent — it is inverted. He did the opposite of each thing.

Where Ismail's people imported and installed a trained interpreter class, Nadir killed the head of the existing one and appointed no comparable structure in its place; there is no Ja'fari hierarchy, no new order of jurists, no examined path into a Ja'fari clergy. Where Ismail's people endowed madrasas in perpetuity, Nadir ran a cadastral survey, confiscated the *waqf* estates, folded them into the *raqabat-e Naderi* under his own fiscal department, and suspended the Safavid framework of pious foundations altogether — and those endowments were, in the plain formulation of the scholarship,

the main source of financial support for the important ulama. He did not merely fail to fund a new interpreter class. **He defunded the schools that existed and built none to replace them.**

He founded a school of law with no schools in it.

Why he did that is the question, and the answer joins this module to the two before it. Endowing a permanent, self-reproducing body of interpreters is not a different kind of act from making a settlement. It is the *same* act performed on a different class. To create a clergy you must alienate property to it in perpetuity — you must make owners, and owners of exactly the sort a ruler cannot revoke, since the whole legal point of *waqf* is that no future shah can take it back. Nadir's position, as this study has already established, made owners unaffordable: he held no warrant of his own, so anything he granted was worth only his life expectancy, and men endowed by him would have been independent without being loyal. The instrument that installs a belief in a population is the instrument that manufactures owners of the men who teach it. **He could not fund a formation for the same reason he could not make a settlement, and it is the same reason: he had no title to convey.**

There is a further and darker turn. The endowments he confiscated were the *existing* formation's funding — the counter-formation's, the one that had two centuries of compounding behind it and had installed the very belief he was trying to displace. So the confiscation looks, from one angle, like an attack on his rival's transmission mechanism, and to that extent it was rational. But it produced no vacancy he could fill, because he was not in a position to fill it, and the framework's rule is that the trusted-information position cannot be emptied — a suppression that destroys one occupant clears the ground for another. What it cleared the ground for here was not a Ja'fari establishment. It was a dispossessed Shi'i ulama with a permanent material grievance, and, in the countryside, the same beliefs going on unfunded and unsupervised. In the last year of his reign he decreed the resumption of the pious foundations, which is the conduct of a man who had worked out what he had done.

Eight clerics, three Europeans and five Armenian priests

What he built instead, in place of a formation, is the most revealing thing in the module, and it is a genuinely extraordinary episode.

Sometime around his Indian campaign Nadir's attention was caught by a verse of the Qur'an — 48:29, which refers to the *tawrat* and the *injil*, the Torah and the Gospel. The question that interested him was whether the verse referred to Ali or to the first caliphs, and whether the other heavenly books would settle the matter one way or the other. So he ordered his secretary and court historian, Mirza Mahdi Khan

Astarabadi, to arrange Persian translations, and a committee was assembled at Isfahan: by the account in the scholarship, eight Muslim clerics, three Europeans and five Armenian priests worked on the Gospels and the Qur'an; Rabbi Baba'i ben Nuri'el of Isfahan and three other rabbis translated the Pentateuch and the Psalms; Mir Muhammad Ma'sum Husayni Khatunabadi and his son Abd al-Ghani worked alongside them. The task took a little over a year and was finished in mid-1741. The manuscripts survive, in the Vatican Library, the Bibliothèque Nationale and the Ben-Zvi Institute.

What happened when the work was read to him is recorded, dated, and worth quoting in full, because it is the only surviving account of Nadir stating his own religious intention in the first person. John Malcolm, drawing on Hanway and on a Persian manuscript in his own possession, places the scene in May 1741:

> *"Extracts from the imperfect translation that had been made of the New Testament were read to him, and he amused himself, and some of his hearers, with ludicrous remarks on the mysterious parts of the Christian faith. The tenets of the Jews, and the traditions of the Mahomedans, were treated with the same freedom: and the tyrant broke up this assembly of divines with a declaration, that, if God spared him, he would make a religion, much better than any of those that mankind yet possessed."*

He would make a religion. That is the forging move stated by the man himself, in the first person, with a condition attached — *if God spared him* — which turns out to be the only part of the sentence that mattered. It is also the plainest possible confirmation of what this study has argued about the whole programme. A ruler who proposes to manufacture a faith better than the ones mankind has is a ruler who has understood that a currency of legitimacy is a made thing, and has not understood that being made is not the same as being current. Malcolm's own judgement on the surrounding evidence is that Nadir's conduct in religious matters was uninfluenced by any motive except policy, and that he appears to have had no fixed sentiments on the subject at all — a verdict from a hostile witness at ninety years' distance, but one that squares with what the physician Bazin reported from inside the tent.

Now set the declaration beside the project that produced it, and look at what that project *is*.

It is a research programme. A man with a doctrinal question convenes the relevant specialists across three religions, commissions the primary texts in a language he can read, and proposes to determine what the sacred text means. On its own terms this is admirable — it is a great deal more open-minded than anything the Safavid

establishment would have countenanced, and it produced a real scholarly object that is still in the libraries. But as an act of statecraft it tells you the thing this module needs to know, and the framework has a name for it. **A doctrine held as *tested* is one that can be revised when the evidence goes against it. A doctrine held as *revealed* is one where failure is read as insufficient faith.** A robe has to be the second. A robe that is publicly submitted to investigation has announced that it is a proposition, and a proposition can be declined.

Set the two halves of his religious programme side by side and neither is formation. Abroad, he pursued the Ja'fari *madhhab* as a **treaty negotiation** — a claim to be conceded by a foreign sovereign in exchange for considerations. At home, he pursued its foundations as a **research project** — a question to be settled by comparing texts. Both treat the content of the faith as something currently unsettled and shortly to be determined by competent authority. Formation is the exact opposite operation. It does not argue, negotiate or investigate. It hands a child a world and lets him grow up inside it, so that by the time he is old enough to have an opinion the thing is not an opinion but the floor he is standing on. Nothing Nadir did in eleven years touched a single child.

A doctrine they were made to sign

Which brings out the difference that governs the whole case, and it is a difference of *visibility*.

Consider how the Safavid claim arrived at an Iranian of 1730. It arrived as the shape of the world. The genealogy from the Seventh Imam was, as Krusinski could see and say at the time, unprovable — too great a space between the trunk and the branches. But nobody had to believe it in the way one believes an argument, because nobody had been present when it was made. It had been there before their grandparents. Its enforcement had long since stopped needing enforcers; the neighbours did it for free.

Now consider how Nadir's claim arrived. It arrived at a specific place on a specific date, from a specific man who was standing in front of you with an army camped around the assembly, having just had the country's senior cleric strangled for saying what everyone knew. It arrived in the form of a document you were **required to sign**. The framework's phrase for what a durable belief becomes is that it is furniture — you walk past it. Propaganda is something you notice and evaluate. A doctrine circulated with a signature block is not furniture. It is a memo, and everyone who signs one knows precisely what he is signing and why he is signing it now.

This is the structural reason warlordism cannot do what the founded order does, and it is worth stating as generally as the evidence supports. The men who ran early

Safavid Iran — the Qizilbash amirs, who held the actual military force while a fourteen-year-old held the sacred office, and who spent a decade after Ismail's death fighting one another for control of a ten-year-old shah without one of them attempting to take his place — were able to say *we are restoring*. Nadir could only say *I am changing this*. The first sentence points at an anchor outside the moment, which nobody in the moment can move. The second points at the speaker, and everyone can see the speaker, and everyone can see that the speaker will not always be there.

That is what an outside warrant buys, and it is the thing this study has been circling since the landscape: not that the anchor is true, but that it is *not in anyone's gift*. A settlement resting on such an anchor survives the death of any particular strongman, because the anchor does not die. A settlement resting on the strongman's own declaration expires with the declaration, and every man who signed it knows the expiry date is a medical question.

The calendar he emptied and did not fill

The framework asks for the yearly cycle — the ritual calendar that scored the year and rehearsed the order — because that is where formation does its repeating work.

Iran had one, and it was one of the most thoroughly developed in the Islamic world: the Muharram mourning and Ashura, the visitation of the shrines, the annual and life-cycle rites that put the wrong done to the family of the Prophet at the centre of the year, and the routine cursing that made allegiance a thing one *said* out loud on a schedule.

Nadir took things out of it. The cursing went; the edicts of mid-1736 restricted Shi'i ritual observance. And he put nothing in. There is no Afsharid festival, no new commemoration, no annual occasion at which the reclassification of Shi'ism as a Sunni school of law was rehearsed before the population. The single instrument he introduced that touched the ordinary man's daily life was the four-peaked cap — an item of clothing, worn by soldiers and officials, which required no belief whatever and disappeared the moment the man who mandated it did.

Consider what that cap actually was as a formative instrument. It made its wearer publicly complicit, which is real: a man in a four-peaked cap has stopped being a Qizilbash whatever he privately thinks. But complicity under observation is compliance, not conviction, and the framework's warning is exact — a population merely performing does not reliably change its conduct when a ruling costs nothing to ignore. The cap was, in the end, the tell rather than the instrument: an order that must be identified by what it makes people wear is an order that could not get inside them.

Where he did form men, and what it produced

There is one institution in this reign that did install durable dispositions in the men who passed through it, and it is not religious. It is the army.

The evidence that the formation was real is that it travelled. A man who spent five years in Nadir's service learned a whole trade: drill, volley fire under voice command in silence, the handling of camel-borne guns, the movement of a combined-arms force across a thousand miles of Asia, the expectation of pay on time and plunder honestly divided. And the men who learned it carried it away and used it, which is the strictest available test of whether a formation took.

Ahmad Khan Abdali commanded the Afghan contingent. In 1747 he went east with a body of Afghan troops and a portion of the treasure and founded the Durrani state, and the military practices he took with him — including the short blunderbuss-style cavalry carbines that turn up across eighteenth-century Indian warfare — plausibly originated in Nadir's army. **Karim Khan Zand** was a Lak tribesman from the Zagros whom Nadir had deported to Khorasan to serve in that army; he rose through it, led his people home after the assassination, and became the ruler under whom Iran had its one interval of decent government in the century. **Heraclius II of Georgia** learned war campaigning with Nadir toward India, and used it to unify eastern Georgia for the first time in three centuries.

So the reign's most successful formative institution produced three of the men who dismembered the empire, and one of them founded the state that took its eastern half. That is not an irony; it is a precise finding. What the army installed was **competence**, and competence is portable. What it did not install — because there was nothing there to install — was any account of why the arrangement was rightful, which is the only thing that is not portable, because it only works where the arrangement stands.

What the base did

The framework's strongest available test at the base is not to mind-read the subject but to ask what the population actually *did* the last time the order made a determination about legitimacy. Afsharid Iran supplies an unusually clean instance, because the determination was made explicitly, repeatedly, and under threat.

Everyone at Mughan signed. A decree required all Iranians to abide by the settlement. Letters went to religious officials warning that non-compliance would be punished. Communities that resisted were dealt with savagely. And the result, across eleven years of the most formidable coercive apparatus in Asia, was nothing. The *madhhab-i Ja'fari* did not become the name of anything in Iran. The four-peaked cap

vanished with the man. The cursing came back. And when the floor was removed in June 1747, the country's political class did not spend a moment looking for a Ja'fari settlement to defend; within a year they were competing over who could produce the best Safavid.

The competition is worth setting out, because it is the counter-formation's receipt. Adil Shah massacred every one of Nadir's descendants at Kalat and spared precisely one — Shahrokh, thirteen years old, whose mother was a Safavid princess — in case the lineage came in useful. In December 1749 a party of tribal leaders deposed Shahrokh and installed the *mutawalli* of the Imam Reza shrine as Suleiman II, on the strength of his Safavid grandmother. Forty days later they blinded Suleiman and restored Shahrokh, whose Safavid blood ran through the other side. In 1750 Karim Khan Zand and Ali Mardan Khan Bakhtiari took Isfahan and installed a seventeen-year-old Safavid prince as Ismail III, and Karim Khan then ruled Iran for something close to three decades **without ever taking the title of shah**, calling himself *vakil*, deputy — and reinterpreting the word as *vakil al-ra'aya*, deputy of the subjects, which was the name of a minor local office for hearing complaints against the government. When Ismail III died in comfortable confinement at Abada in 1773, the fiction was quietly dropped.

Read that sequence against Nadir's eleven years. The strongest man in Iran for a generation after him had served in his army, had watched the entire experiment from inside the tent, and drew the conclusion that a man in his position should rent a warrant rather than mint one and should not, under any circumstances, sit down in the chair himself. That is the filter's verdict on the method, delivered by a graduate.

Reading formation against the framework

The framework says formation is the quiet centre of cheap rule — it loads the benefit column, draws the field of the visible, and primes the community's enforcement, all at once and early and for free. Afsharid Iran confirms every part of that by showing what happens in its absence, and adds one structural finding that the card should carry, because it unifies two modules the card currently keeps apart.

Formation requires an endowment, and an endowment is a settlement with the interpreter class. A belief is not installed in a population by decree, by argument, or by the personal conviction of a ruler. It is installed by a funded, self-reproducing institution that catches people in childhood and outlives everyone who built it — and such an institution can only exist if property has been alienated to it permanently, beyond the granter's power of recall. Which means creating a formation is *the same operation* as creating a landed class: in both cases the ruler makes owners, and in both

cases the point is precisely that he cannot take it back, since a grant he could revoke would produce neither a defender nor a believer.

The consequence is severe and it generalises well beyond this case. **A ruler who cannot make owners cannot make believers.** The two capacities are not merely correlated; they are the same capacity applied to two classes, and both are downstream of holding a warrant, because a grant is only worth its warrant. So the position that forecloses a settlement forecloses a formation by the identical mechanism, and an apex in that position has not one problem but one problem showing up in three places: he cannot bind his elite, he cannot install a belief, and he cannot transfer his throne. This study has now watched the same failure occur three times under three different headings, and the compounding is the finding: they were never three failures.

Two smaller additions follow.

On the visibility of a robe, which the card should state as a variable in its own right. The provenance question — forged, redirected, or inherited — asks where a claim came from. This case shows that *when the audience saw it arrive* is a separate and equally predictive fact. A forged claim laid down by a founder and left to compound becomes furniture within three generations, and its manufactured origin does it no harm at all: the Safavid descent from Musa al-Kazim was unprovable to a contemporary Jesuit doing arithmetic in Isfahan and it held for two centuries, because nobody alive had been in the room. A forged claim laid down inside the audience's own lifetime, with a signing ceremony and a strangled objector, cannot become furniture at all — not because it is more false, but because everybody watched the carpenter. **The diagnostic is whether the population is old enough to remember the doctrine being installed**; where it is, no amount of force will convert compliance into conviction, and the ruler is condemned to pay for the belief in coin and surveillance for as long as he lives.

And on the counter-formation, which is where this case bears on the corpus's colonial studies. Those cases produced a recurring shape: a conqueror who withholds his own formation from the conquered majority, so that the old order simply holds the field. Afsharid Iran is the same shape arrived at from the opposite direction and it therefore isolates the mechanism. Nadir did not withhold a formation out of contempt or economy; he attempted one, energetically, with total force, a coherent argument, and a real intellectual programme behind it, and could not build the funding structure it required. So the null is not an absence of will. **It is a demonstration that formation cannot be bought with force, because the thing that must be purchased is time, and the only currency time accepts is an institution that will outlive the purchaser.** The Safavid conquest was a former conquest that had reached the cheap

pole and become the world. Nadir's was an expensive-pole conquest laid over it that never left the sword. The two orders met in the same country for eleven years, and the one that could not be seen being made was the one still standing at the end.

A note on sources

The account of the Safavid institutional build follows the standard scholarship as summarised in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*: the recruitment of Twelver jurists from Jabal Amil and Bahrayn and Ali al-Karaki's appointment as shaykh al-Islam at Tabriz around 1508–10 (with Andrew Newman's dissent on the scale and politics of that migration noted, as elsewhere in this study); the offices of *sadr*, *shaykh al-Islam* and the *mullabashi* created under Soltan Hosayn; the endowment structure; and the *tabarra'iyan*, on whom Rosemary Stanfield-Johnson's work is the authority. Nadir's religious measures — the strangling of Mirza Abu'l-Hasan, the abolition of *sabb* and *rafd* at Mughan, the requirement that all present sign, the edicts of June–July 1736 restricting Shi'i ritual, the prohibition of *'Ali wali Allāh*, the four-peaked *kolah-e Naderi* replacing the twelve-gored Qizilbash *taj*, the cadastral survey and the *raqabat-e Naderi*, the suspension of the pious foundations following the establishment of the Ja'fari *madhhab*, and the decree resuming them in the last year of the reign — follow Ernest Tucker's *Encyclopaedia Iranica* article on Nader Shah and his *Nadir Shah's Quest for Legitimacy in Post-Safavid Iran* (2006), together with Ann Lambton's *Landlord and Peasant in Persia*, pp. 129–33, as cited there.

The translation project of 1739–41 follows the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* article on Persian translations of the Bible and the specialist literature it cites: Nadir's interest in Qur'an 48:29 and whether it referred to Ali or to the first caliphs; his instruction to Astarabadi; the composition of the working parties, given in the literature as eight Muslim clerics, three Europeans and five Armenian priests on the Gospels and the Qur'an, with Rabbi Baba'i ben Nuri'el of Isfahan and three other rabbis on the Pentateuch and Psalms and Mir Muhammad Ma'sum Husayni Khatunabadi and his son among the Muslim participants; completion in mid-1741; and the survival of manuscripts in the Vatican Library, the Bibliothèque Nationale and the Ben-Zvi Institute. The account of the assembly at which extracts were read to Nadir, his remarks on the Christian mysteries, the Jewish tenets and the Muslim traditions, and his declaration that if God spared him he would make a religion better than any mankind yet possessed, is quoted from Sir John Malcolm, *The History of Persia* (London, 1815), vol. II, ch. XVII, as that public-domain edition prints it; Malcolm dates the occasion to May 1741, cites Jonas Hanway's *An Historical Account of the British Trade over the Caspian Sea* (London, 1753), vol. II, p. 404, and elsewhere in the

same chapter refers to a Persian manuscript in his own possession. Malcolm is a British envoy writing at ninety years' distance and hostile to his subject, and this study has elsewhere shown him transmitting the court historian's partition of the reign into English; the declaration is therefore a report of speech at one remove rather than a document, and is presented as such. Malcolm's accompanying judgement that Nadir's religious conduct was uninfluenced by any motive but policy, and that he appears to have held no fixed sentiments on the subject, is his and is marked as his.

On the early Safavid distribution of power the text follows the standard account — Ismail's accession at fourteen, the appointment of Husayn Beg Shamlu as *vakil* and commander of the Qizilbash army, Ismail's withdrawal from government after Chaldiran in 1514 and the ascendancy and killing of the vizier Mirza Shah Hosayn in 1523, Tahmasp's accession at ten and the Qizilbash factional wars of the following decade — while noting that a recent revisionist reading in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* argues against the "interregnum" model and holds that the Qizilbash consistently treated Tahmasp as their leader throughout his minority. The text is written so as not to depend on which reading prevails, since the point at issue — that the amirs contested control *of* the shah and not the necessity of one — is common to both.

The post-1747 material follows John Perry's work ("The Last Safavids, 1722–1773," *Iran* 9, 1971; *Karim Khan Zand*, 1979) as summarised in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* articles on the Zand dynasty and on Karim Khan Zand: the sparing of Shahrokh for his Safavid descent; the deposition of Shahrokh in December 1749 and the installation of Mir Sayyed Mohammad, *mutawalli* of the Imam Reza shrine, as Suleiman II on the strength of his Safavid mother; the restoration of Shahrokh some forty days later; the installation of Abu Torab as Ismail III on 29 June 1750 by Karim Khan, Ali Mardan Khan Bakhtiari and Abu'l-Fath Khan; Karim Khan's lifelong refusal of the title *shah* and his adoption and reinterpretation of *vakil* as *vakil al-ra'aya*, the name of a local office for investigating complaints of administrative abuse; and the death of Ismail III at Abada in 1773. Karim Khan's origin as a Lak deported by Nadir to Khorasan to serve in his army is from the same literature. Michael Axworthy's "The Army of Nader Shah" (*Iranian Studies* 40:5, 2007) and Jos Gommans's work on Afghan military innovation are the authorities for the suggestion that eighteenth-century Indian cavalry practices originated in Nadir's army, where Ahmad Shah Durrani commanded the Afghan contingent.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited throughout, not quoted at length. Where a claim rests on anecdote or on a single interested witness that is stated at the point of use, and no quotation, date, attribution or figure has been reconstructed from

memory. The extraction crisis of the 1740s, the suppression apparatus, and the assassination and its aftermath are treated at length elsewhere in this study.

THE FREEDOM OF EGRESS

Module 5 · The Cost Column — why the ordinary subject complied, ledger by ledger; and the dated moment at which an order that had never needed to close its roads began checking passports at the frontier

The two dials, run backwards

The framework's account of why an ordinary subject complies is a ledger with two columns. The benefit column is filled by belief, where a belief has been installed; the cost column is filled by a credible enforcer who can reach him and whom he knows can reach him. Where the belief is thick the force withdraws to the margins and the order runs cheap. Where the belief is thin the cost column has to be held high by visible force, and the extractor turns two dials to set how much he can take: the credibility of punishment, and the availability of exit. Where every door is shut, the floor sinks toward the biological bone.

Afsharid Iran runs this apparatus in an unusual configuration, and the configuration is the module. The benefit column toward the ordinary Iranian subject was empty from the start — the reclassification of Shi'ism as a school of Sunni law installed nothing in anybody, and the man who decreed it was visibly a Turkmen soldier with no claim on anyone's conscience. So compliance had to come entirely from the cost side. And on the cost side, one of the two dials was for most of the reign turned the *wrong* way: Iran's roads were open, its frontiers were porous in four directions, and its population had not been disarmed. The order therefore ran, for a decade, on credible punishment alone, with the exit standing open — and the record lets us watch what happens when an extractor in that position pushes the rate past the point the exit can absorb.

The soldier's ledger

Take first the man whose compliance mattered most, because he was the enforcer.

A trooper in Nadir's army in, say, 1738 had the best ledger available to anyone in Asia. He was paid in cash, on time, in newly struck silver of a weight standard people trusted. He received a share of plunder, and after India he received arrears plus a gratuity specifically designed to reward him for declaring what he had taken privately rather than concealing it. English travellers who saw the army after Delhi reported that

even the meaner soldiers had clothes of rich silk and plenty of Indian money. He was fed, mounted where his branch required it, drilled into a body that did not lose, and commanded by a man who had never yet been beaten. If he was an Abdali who had been fighting Nadir two years earlier, none of that was held against him; the terms were the same.

Nothing in this ledger is belief. Every item is a payment or a prospect of payment, and the whole column is therefore contingent on the next campaign paying for itself. That is the arrangement Module 1 described from the top: an army recruited by conquest and paid from conquest, which cannot stand still. Read from the soldier's chair rather than the commander's, it means something simpler and more dangerous — his loyalty had exactly the duration of the payments, and he knew it, and so did everyone above him.

The peasant's ledger, and the three years without taxes

Now the man the whole thing rested on.

Between 1729 and 1739 the Iranian peasant's ledger was, on any honest accounting, better than it had been in the two decades before. The Afghans were gone, the Ottomans had been pushed back to the 1639 line, the Russians had withdrawn from the Caspian provinces by treaty, and a single authority ran the country between them. That is real, and this study has already credited it. Whether it was worth the requisitions, the conscription and the campaigns that produced it is a different question, and it is the question the second half of the reign answers.

Then came Delhi, and for a period the peasant's ledger improved sharply, because his taxes were remitted. Hanway, reporting what actually reached the provinces, says the decree exempted the country for a whole year from 10 March 1739, and that officials who had begun collecting were ordered to refund and did; most of the later literature reports a three-year remission. Either way the point holds. For a period after 1739, the man in the village was paying nothing, because the war was being funded from the sack of a foreign capital.

He was also being shown, whether he understood it or not, the actual structure of the arrangement he lived under. His tax bill had nothing to do with what his own government cost. It was a residual — whatever the army needed minus whatever the last campaign had produced — and it could therefore go to zero in a good year and to something unpayable in a bad one, with no relation whatever to his capacity to pay.

1742

The bad years arrived on schedule. The Daghestan campaigns of 1741–43 consumed men, animals and money and produced nothing; there was no treasury to plunder in those mountains and no ruler to surrender on everyone's behalf. Meanwhile the army had continued to grow, the fleet was being built at Bushehr with timber hauled from Mazandaran at great expense, and the Ottoman war was being prepared. The taxes were reimposed and then driven up, and in 1742–43 governors were ordered to raise collections and to recover arrears, including from groups previously exempted.

Hanway describes the result, and it is worth quoting at the length the argument needs, because he is a contemporary writing from the reports of men who were in the country:

> *"Exorbitant taxes, exacted with all the aggravating circumstances which inhumanity can suggest, drove thousands to despair. Whole villages and towns retired into the mountains, to avoid the barbarous treatment shewn them by the shah's collectors."*

And immediately before it, the sentence that supplies the arithmetic:

> *"Notwithstanding the vast projects which nadir had formed, and the numerous forces he was preparing... he had not yet touched his Indian treasures, since they were deposited at kælat."*

That is the whole case in two adjacent clauses. The wealth of the Mughal empire was sitting under guard in a mountain fortress in Khorasan while the collectors were driving villagers into the hills, and the two facts were true on the same day and reported in the same paragraph. It is not necessary to attribute this to avarice, and the study will decline to; the structural reading is available and better. The treasure at Kalat was not spending money. It was the personal reserve of a man with no title, held where only he could authorise its release, because it was the only thing he had that could not be taken from him by anybody's defection. A ruler who owns nothing conveyable holds his wealth as a hoard, precisely because a hoard is the one form in which possession needs no warrant.

The freedom of egress

Now the finding this module exists for, and it is dated.

The people did what people do when the cost column fills and the door is open. Hanway:

> *"Crowds of the people fled into the northern parts of India, where their king had so lately triumphed; and great numbers put themselves under the protection of the Turks. On the southern coast some fled into arabia; and not a few took every opportunity of transporting themselves by sea into the moghol's empire."*

Four exits — east into Mughal India, west into Ottoman territory, south into Arabia, and by sea across the Gulf — plus the fifth and cheapest, which was simply to go up into the mountains and stop being findable. Note the detail Hanway cannot resist and which does more work than any figure: they fled *into India*, the country their own king had sacked three years earlier. Given the choice between the conqueror at home and the conquered abroad, they chose the conquered.

And then the response, which is the module's central evidence:

> *"The Armenians and others, who were equally distressed by exactions, left their habitations under the pretence of commerce or religious pilgrimages; insomuch that the rahdars were ordered to examine passports. The freedom of egress, which used to prevail, was much interrupted, on this occasion, orders being given to the daroughas, and also to the rahdars of great cities, not to let any one pass near the frontiers without passports. As these were responsible if any person missed them, they were very vigilant in their duty."*

The *rahdars* were the keepers of the road-posts, an old institution whose ordinary business was tolls and keeping the highways clear; the *daroughas* were police officials. What is being described is the improvisation of a frontier control regime out of existing road-toll infrastructure, at speed, in response to flight — with the crucial administrative move at the end, which is that the officials were made **personally liable for anyone who got past them**.

The framework says the extractor turns two dials, the credibility of punishment and the availability of exit. This passage shows the second dial being turned, and it shows *when* and *why*: not as a founding condition of the order, not as a considered policy of enclosure, but retroactively, in the fourth year after the Indian treasure came home, because the rate had gone past what an open country could absorb and the tax base was walking out of it. The freedom of egress "which used to prevail" is a contemporary's testimony that for the first decade of the reign there had been no such regime, because there had been no such need.

Hanway then adds the thing that made the door narrower than it looked, and it belongs in the ledger because it is what actually held people in place:

> *"The persians usually travel with their women, and all the furniture necessary to life; under these circumstances it was very difficult for them to escape, had they been sure of bread in foreign climates."*

That is the real trap and it is not made of soldiers. A household does not flee; a young man does. Flight selects for those with the least to move and the most to gain, which means the fleeing population is disproportionately the productive young — and what is left behind is a village that has lost its labour and kept its tax assessment. The result around Isfahan, in Hanway's account, is districts "formerly well peopled" that "exhibited only a dreary waste, most of the inhabitants being fled or dispersed," with numbers taking refuge in the mountains of Luristan, "their lands left untilled, and their houses mouldered into ruins."

The apparatus that priced defection

What actually made the cost column credible for the man who stayed? Three things, and none of them a garrison in the ordinary sense.

The first was **the certainty of the collectors**. Nadir did not administer through a bureaucracy he trusted; he administered by moving himself, an itinerant court between Mashhad, Kalat and the field camp, intervening personally, ordering specific remittances from named provinces, and executing treasury officials for shortfalls. That produced collectors who could not be bribed into leniency because their own necks were on the assessment, which is a far more reliable instrument of extraction than any number of soldiers.

The second was **exemplary punishment of an unusually inventive kind**. Hanway, who had access to the reports of men who had been there, records that none of Iran's former kings ever inflicted punishments in a greater variety, or with circumstances more whimsical and extravagant. The towers of heads that the shah raised across the provinces in the last years — in conscious imitation of Timur, whose skull-towers he had studied — were the broadcast instrument, put where travellers would carry the news ahead of the army. The framework's reading of broadcast terror, developed in the Mexica case, is that it is the tell of an order with no garrison: a state that could station troops in every district would not need to leave monuments in the ones it had left. That reading holds here exactly. Nadir's field army was enormous and it was almost always somewhere else.

The third was **informers**. Hanway records two episodes that are small and precise and worth more than a general statement. When somebody wrote a pointed couplet on the walls of the mausoleum Nadir was building for himself at Mashhad — a play on the

shah's name observing that his renown filled every corner of the earth but his place here was very void — severe inquisition was made for the author; it was concluded to be the work of a man of letters, and many *mullahs* were brought to trial, of whom some "were whipt to such an extremity, that they expired under the lash." And when a certain person observed of a fountain in Isfahan that the higher the water is thrown up the greater the velocity of its fall, the remark reached the shah and the man "gratified his wit at no less an expence than his life." Hanway's summary of the mechanism is the operative sentence: *"Nadir never wanted the base instruments of tyranny to acquaint him of the minutest actions."*

Two men killed for a joke and a piece of graffiti is not a large body count. It is, however, an extremely efficient piece of pricing, and it tells you what the cost column looked like from inside: not that the state could see everything, but that it might see anything, and that the schedule of consequences had no ceiling.

The Indian townsman, 1739

One further ledger, because the corpus should have it and because it is the same machine operating where it was under no constraint at all.

In Delhi in the spring of 1739 the contributions were assessed on the city's merchants, moneychangers and notables and collected by torture. Hanway records that the Mughal emperor's own vizier was exposed openly to the sun — a punishment both painful and humiliating, and in that climate dangerous — until he produced a crore of rupees besides jewels and elephants; that his secretary, taxed heavily and handed to another officer to be tortured if he did not pay, forestalled it with poison; and that the representative of the governor of Bengal, told his province was assessed at seven crores, joked that such a sum would need a line of wagons from Bengal to the capital, was severely beaten for the sarcasm, went home and poisoned himself together with his entire family.

Then the mechanics, which are exact and which generalise:

> *"It is not easy to conceive with what rigor these contributions were levied; and what numbers destroyed themselves with their own hands, to be delivered from the tortures and punishments with which they were threatened... the tax imposed was strictly exacted, tho in the computation of the respective abilities of the inhabitants, numerous mistakes were made; besides, as there were no purchasers of their effects, except the persians, hardly a quarter of their value was paid."*

An assessment made without knowledge of capacity, enforced without appeal, payable only by selling into a market with a single buyer who was also the assessor.

Many left their goods and their families and ran for Agra, where the governor took them in and posted six thousand horse to protect the fugitives.

Hanway adds an observation about the difference between the two populations that is worth carrying, because it is a rare contemporary comment on formation. The Indians of distinction, he says, felt such indignities keenly, because the gentler treatment they had been accustomed to "gave them very different impressions from what the persians received in the like circumstances." Whatever one makes of that as ethnography, as a remark about expectation it is precise: what a population will endure without breaking is a function of what it has been taught to expect, and Iranians had been taught to expect a great deal.

What the ledger looked like at the end

By 1745 the answer to *why does he comply* had, for a great many Iranians, become *he does not*.

Revolt after revolt: Muhammad Taqi Khan Shirazi, the governor of Fars and one of Nadir's favourites, from January 1744; the Bakhtiari under Ali Morad; risings in Astarabad, in Shirvan, among the Kurds, in Khwarazm, along the Ottoman frontier, and a string of Safavid pretenders. The framework's rule is that popular rising rarely seizes the apparatus but reliably changes the price of a policy, and that is what happened: the revolts of 1744 forced Nadir to break off the Ottoman war, and his bargaining position at Kordan in 1746 was weakened not by the sultan's armies but by his own provinces. That is cost, not authorship, and both halves should be stated.

And when the end came, the successor regime's own public justification is the best summary of the cost column anyone wrote. The accession decree of Adil Shah — Nadir's nephew, who had risen in revolt two months before the assassination and who is a wholly interested witness — describes the reign to the population it was addressed to in these terms: that the subjects of Iran were too well acquainted with the late king's proceedings; that their incessant cries had reached the heavens; that by putting out the eyes of the inhabitants, depriving them of their lives, and selling the sons and daughters of Muslims, even the seven celestial circles were moved to compassion; that the extortion of lakhs and crores had been the cause of multitudes of people losing their sight; and that the tyrannical monarch had barbarously erected lofty towers of human heads through the provinces, exceeding all the cruelties of past ages. Hanway, reproducing the decree, appends the sort of footnote that shows a careful man at work: *"I have heard that the number of persons blinded, was not less than thirty thousand: but this seems to be exaggerated."*

That document is a robe, and this study will read it as one: it is the incoming regime explaining why the killing of a shah was a public service. But a robe has to be cut from cloth the audience recognises. What Adil Shah judged that Iranians would accept as an accurate description of the previous eleven years is itself evidence, and what he chose to lead with was not conquest, or heresy, or the murder of the Safavids. It was blinding, enslavement, and tax.

Reading the cost column against the framework

The framework's account survives this case unchanged in its essentials and gains one dated mechanism and one specification.

The mechanism: exit control is downstream of extraction, and its construction is a datable event. The card treats the availability of exit as one of two dials an extractor turns, which implies a setting he chooses in advance. Afsharid Iran shows the dial being turned *afterwards*, as damage control, and shows why. An extractor whose rate crosses the revolt-and-flight threshold has, in principle, two remedies: ease the rate, or close the doors. Easing the rate requires somebody in the arrangement whose position depends on the taxpayer surviving into next year — a settled class with a permanent claim on future output, which is exactly what this order did not have and, as Module 2 established, structurally could not have. So the only remedy available was the second one, and the *rahdars* were put on passports.

The general form is worth stating because it should be checkable elsewhere: **where an order builds an exit-control apparatus it did not previously possess, look for a recent crossing of the extraction threshold and an absent settlement, and date the crossing from the order.** In this case the passport regime falls around 1742, which places the crossing between the exhaustion of the Indian treasure and the failure of the Daghestan campaigns — and that is a tighter date than the revolts themselves supply, since the revolts follow it by a year or two. An exit-control order is an earlier and more sensitive instrument than a rebellion.

The specification: on surveillance as a tell. The card's line is that surveillance is the tell of a belief that never took. That holds here and needs sharpening, because Nadir's surveillance apparatus was not present from the beginning. There were informers throughout, but the systematic instruments — the passport regime, the frontier controls, the officials held personally liable for escapees, the inquisitions over graffiti — belong to the last five years. So the tell is not simply of a thin belief but of **a thin belief under a rising rate**, and it is the *date of construction* rather than the existence of the apparatus that carries the information. An order with no belief and a

sustainable rate can run for a long time without much surveillance, because there is no reason to leave. Surveillance appears when the ledger tips, and it times the tipping.

And a refusal. Hanway's own verdict on all this is that Nadir "seemed more solicitous to humble his own subjects, than his enemies," and it is a natural conclusion for a man watching a country being wrecked by a ruler who had just enriched it. This study declines the psychology and offers the structure instead, because the structure predicts the same conduct without requiring the malice. An order with no settlement contains nobody whose own position depends on the taxpayer being alive next spring. The collectors were salaried and liable; the officers held nothing they could lose; the treasure was in a fortress. There was therefore no interest anywhere in the machine pulling the rate back down, and the rate accordingly went up until the people underneath it left, and then the doors were shut, and then they revolted, and then they killed him. Module 2 offered that as a prediction — that the tuning mechanism on the extraction rate is supplied by the settlement, and an order with no settlement cannot tune. The passports of 1742 are the prediction coming due, and the study will hold the fuller accounting of the rate itself, in numbers where the record allows, for the module that follows.

A note on sources

All quotations in this module are from Jonas Hanway, *An Historical Account of the British Trade over the Caspian Sea: with a Journal of Travels... to which are added, the Revolutions of Persia during the present Century* (London, 1753), vol. II, and are given as that public-domain edition prints them, with its spelling and capitalisation: the exorbitant taxes exacted "with all the aggravating circumstances which inhumanity can suggest" and the flight of whole villages into the mountains; the note that the Indian treasures remained untouched at Kalat; the flight into northern India, Ottoman territory, Arabia and across the Gulf; the order to the *rahdars* to examine passports and to the *daroughas* and *rahdars* of great cities to let nobody pass near the frontiers without them, with those officials held responsible; the interruption of "the freedom of egress, which used to prevail"; the observation that Persians travelled with their households and could not easily escape; the desolation of the districts around Isfahan; the levying of the Delhi contributions, the vizier exposed to the sun, the secretary's and the Bengal *vakil*'s suicides, the sale of effects at a quarter value to a single class of buyers, and the flight to Agra; the punishments, the inquisition over the couplet written on the walls of the Mashhad mausoleum and the *mullahs* whipped to death, the execution of the man who joked about the fountain, and the remark that Nadir "never wanted the base instruments of tyranny to acquaint him of the minutest

actions"; and the text of Adil Shah's accession decree with Hanway's own footnote on the reported thirty thousand blinded.

Hanway must be read for what he is: a British merchant writing in the early 1750s, largely at second hand from the reports of Company servants in Persia, hostile to his subject, and writing for a metropolitan readership that expected oriental tyranny. Where his account is used here it is used for what such a witness is good for — dated administrative measures, prices, the mechanics of collection, and the direction and destinations of flight — rather than for verdicts, and his verdicts are marked as his and declined where the text says so. The reported figure of thirty thousand blinded is given in his own sceptical framing and should not be treated as a count; the accession decree is the incoming regime's justification for a coup and is read as such.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited: Michael Axworthy's *The Sword of Persia* and his "The Army of Nader Shah" (*Iranian Studies* 40:5, 2007) for the army's pay and composition; Willem Floor's *The Rise and Fall of Nader Shah: Dutch East India Company Reports, 1730–1747* for the Dutch observers' account of the fiscal ruin of the country, which corroborates Hanway independently from a different national archive; John Perry's "Forced Migration in Iran during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries" (*Iranian Studies* 8:4, 1975) for the resettlement policy; the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* articles on Nader Shah and on the economy from the Safavids through the Zands for the reimposition of taxation after the Indian remission, the orders of 1742–43 to raise collections and recover arrears from previously exempt groups, the execution of treasury officials for shortfalls, and the itinerant character of the court; and Kostikyan and Margaryan's published description of Nadir's decree to the merchants of Agulis (Matenadaran, folder 1g, doc. 1288, December 1742 – January 1743), which is a documentary instance of the same complaints reaching the shah through a petition rather than through a European report. The tax remission after India is given in both the forms the record supplies, one year in Hanway's contemporary account and three years in most later ones. Population estimates for eighteenth-century Iran vary widely and rest on very thin foundations; figures in circulation for the decline across this period are not reproduced here, because none of them is secure enough to carry weight, and the demographic accounting is deferred to the module that can set out the evidence properly.

No quotation, date, attribution or figure has been reconstructed from memory. The rates and mechanisms of extraction, the suppression of the revolts of 1744–46, and the assassination are treated at length elsewhere in this study.

TWELVE MONTHS PAY FOR A HUNDRED AND FORTY THOUSAND MEN

Module 6 · Extraction — the arithmetic of a wage bill that exceeded the entire revenue of the state it was levied on, and what happens to a tax rate when the only thing capable of lowering it is the conquest of somebody else

The fork, taken first

The framework requires one question to be settled before any rate is quoted, because it determines whether a rate is the right instrument at all. Is the thing being taken a **flow** or a **stock**?

Where the object is a flow — harvest, rent, tribute, labour-days — the extractor is drawing at a tunable rate from a producer he needs alive, and the arrangement tends toward an equilibrium just below the point at which the producer revolts or dies. Where the object is a **stock** — the land itself, taken whole for settlement — there is no rate to tune and no equilibrium, only a speed of clearance.

Afsharid Iran is unambiguously the first kind. Nobody was clearing the Iranian peasantry off the land to put anybody else on it; the land was worth nothing without them, and Nadir's need for them was continuous. This is a tributary order in the strict sense, extraction as rate, and the "just enough" equilibrium is therefore the right expectation to bring to it.

Which is what makes the case interesting, because the equilibrium did not appear. The rate went past the threshold, stayed past it, produced flight and then revolt, and did not come back down until the extractor was dead. This module is about why an order of the type that should self-correct did not, and the answer is arithmetical before it is anything else.

The number

Jonas Hanway, writing in the early 1750s from the reports of British Company servants who had been in the country, computed the standing cost of the establishment in a footnote and did not comment on it further:

"Twelve months pay for 140,000 men, at the ordinary computation is 3,400,000 l."

Three million four hundred thousand pounds sterling, annually, for pay alone — not for powder, not for the artillery train, not for the fleet at Bushehr, not for the fortifications at Kalat, not for the camels or the remounts or the grain. Hanway supplies his own exchange rate elsewhere in the same volume, noting that a commander of artillery in Persian service "had fifty tomans, or 120 l. a day," which gives a toman at £2.40. On his own figures, then, the wage bill runs to something on the order of **1.4 million tomans a year**.

Every part of that number should be held loosely and none of it should be discarded. Hanway is second-hand and hostile; "the ordinary computation" is a phrase that conceals whose computation; a single exchange rate taken from one anecdote is a thin instrument. But the figure is the only contemporary estimate of the establishment cost that exists, it was produced by a commercial man in the habit of costing things, and — this is the important point — every direction in which it might be wrong runs the same way. His 140,000 is well below the peak: the army was around 150,000 by 1741 and the total across field armies, garrisons and detachments for the campaign of 1743 has been reckoned at something in the region of 375,000. If the number is out, it is almost certainly out low.

Against what it was levied

Now set it against the revenue base, and here the record is genuinely poor in a way that has to be stated rather than papered over.

Nobody knew what Iran yielded. The European observers who tried to establish it all reported the same difficulty and one of them put it memorably: Raphaël Du Mans, who lived in Isfahan for decades, said that even the provincial viziers claimed not to know, and that on such questions *"the truth means nothing in the mouths of these people. Ask one or another, each will tell you a line according to his caprice. The one will tell you such an excessive amount that the king himself does not have it; another an amount so low that none of his subalterns receive as little."*

What survives is a spread of estimates for the Safavid state at its wealthiest, and they are as follows. Thomas Herbert reported the revenues of Abbas I at 357,000 tomans a year. Engelbert Kaempfer, complaining of the same difficulty, put the land revenues at about 400,000. Du Mans said those of Abbas II did not exceed 600,000 and thought the true figure probably half that. Chardin reckoned the total at about 700,000.

So: a range from roughly 300,000 to 700,000 tomans a year, for the Safavid empire in the middle of the seventeenth century, with a silk trade running, Isfahan intact and populous, the Caucasian provinces yielding, and a century of peace behind it.

The comparison, held with all its caveats, is the spine of this module. **Nadir's army pay alone, on the only contemporary estimate available, ran at somewhere between two and four times the entire annual revenue of the Safavid state at its height** — and it was being levied on an Iran that had lost its capital to a six-month famine-siege, had its western provinces fought over three times in fifteen years, had watched its international trade come to something close to a standstill in the 1720s and resume at a level far below the pre-Afghan one, and was hemorrhaging population. Modern accounts of the period note that under Nadir the population in general lost purchasing power and traders' costs rose with protection payments and other demands.

This is not a case of an extractor pressing an existing system toward its ceiling. It is a case of a fixed obligation that the country could not have met in a good year, in a decade of bad ones.

The step function

Which produces the pattern the record actually shows, and it is not a curve.

From 1736 to 1739 the demand was heavy but bearable and Nadir's early reputation rested partly on tax relief. Then Karnal and Delhi, and the whole obligation was met from outside: the imperial treasury handed over, a fine of twenty million rupees levied on the city, the total conventionally given at something like seven hundred million rupees. And Nadir immediately **remitted taxation in Iran altogether** — for a whole year from 10 March 1739 in Hanway's contemporary report, for three years in most later accounts.

Then the Indian money stopped being income and started being a hoard at Kalat; Daghestan consumed men and produced nothing; the fleet was being built; the Ottoman war was being prepared. And the rate went not back to its 1738 level but far above it. Taxes were reimposed. In 1742–43 governors were ordered to raise collections and to recover arrears, **including from groups that had previously been granted exemption** — which is the fiscal equivalent of the passport order, an administration reaching backwards for money it has already forgiven. The Armenian merchants of Agulis petitioned the shah about the demands and the abuses of his officials, and the *farman* he issued in reply survives in the Matenadaran. Treasury officials were executed for shortfalls.

That is the shape: not a rate settling near a threshold, but a **step function** oscillating between zero and whatever the collectors could physically extract, with the setting

determined not by the taxpayer's capacity but by whether a foreign treasury had recently been captured. In 1739 the correct rate was nothing, because Delhi had paid. In 1743 the correct rate was everything, because Daghestan had not.

What was accepted in satisfaction of it

The framework requires the medium-of-payment test wherever an order taxes a subsistence population: the operative clause of a tax instrument is not the rate, not the base and not the preamble, but what will be accepted in discharge of it. Iran had a functioning coinage, so the test runs here in its ordinary form for the first time in a while — and it produces a result the card does not yet cover.

Nadir rebuilt the currency deliberately. He claimed the sovereign's right of coinage, discontinued the Safavid silver *abbasi*, and struck a new silver piece, the *Naderi*, whose weight standard matched the Mughal rupee — a sensible measure for a ruler whose treasury was about to be filled from India and whose army was about to be paid out of it. The demands on the population were correspondingly in cash: Adil Shah's decree of 1747, abolishing them, calls them "the new contributions in money," with a note that provisions and the like were sometimes demanded as well.

A cash demand looks neutral. It is not, and the mechanism by which it bites is visible with unusual clarity in this case, because Hanway describes the same instrument operating at Delhi in 1739 where there was nothing at all to restrain it:

> *"the tax imposed was strictly exacted, tho in the computation of the respective abilities of the inhabitants, numerous mistakes were made; besides, as there were no purchasers of their effects, except the persians, hardly a quarter of their value was paid."*

Read that as a fiscal instrument rather than as an atrocity. An assessment is fixed in coin, without reference to what the assessed actually holds. The assessed does not hold coin; he holds goods, stock, jewels, a house. To discharge the assessment he must sell — and the only buyers in the market are the men doing the assessing, who therefore set the price at which their own tax is paid. A nominal levy of one unit becomes an actual levy of four. **The rate is set by the terms of exchange, not by the schedule**, and no amount of scrutiny of the schedule will reveal it.

The colonial cases in this corpus found the medium-of-payment clause working as a **labour draft**: a hut tax payable only in a currency the household does not hold compels a man to leave home and earn it, supplying labour without any law compelling labour. Afsharid Iran shows the same clause working as a **liquidation draft**: a cash

demand on a population whose wealth is in things, in a market the taxing power controls or has wrecked, converts a tax into a forced sale at the buyer's price. Same operative clause, different second effect, and the second effect is determined by whether the taxed population's wealth is in its labour or in its stock.

And there is a version of this that requires no bad faith at all and was probably doing most of the work in Iran. A fixed cash assessment, in a country where purchasing power is collapsing and trade has contracted, is **a rising real rate that nobody raised**. The schedule can stay exactly where it is while the burden doubles, because what a peasant must sell to raise a given number of *Naderi* keeps increasing. An administration can be, in its own eyes, merely holding the line, and be crushing people.

Why it could not tune

The framework's account of the "just enough" equilibrium turns on the extractor's interest: he needs the producer alive next year, so he eases off before he kills him. That reasoning assumes somebody in the arrangement holds a claim on next year's output.

This study has established, in reconstructing the settlement, that nobody in Afsharid Iran did. The soldiers were on salaries. The officers held nothing heritable. The governors were appointees moved at will and executed for shortfalls. The endowment class had been expropriated. The one durable grant of position in the whole reign, the Georgian crowns, rested on a warrant that was not Nadir's and produced kings who left. There was, in the entire structure, no man whose own position was a claim on the harvest of 1748 — because no man's position was expected to survive to 1748 in any form that did not depend entirely on Nadir being alive to renew it.

So the feedback loop that produces the equilibrium was not weak here. It was **absent**, and the absence was structural rather than accidental. A collector held personally liable for his assessment has an overwhelming interest in this year's receipts and no interest whatever in next year's tax base, because he does not expect to hold the district and could not pass it to his son if he did. Every incentive in the machine pointed at maximum immediate extraction, and the machine performed exactly as it was built to perform.

The seed for this study predicted that the "just enough" equilibrium would fail outright and would not self-correct. That prediction holds, with one refinement the evidence forces. There *was* a correction: the remission of 1739, which was enormous and real. But it did not come from inside. It came from Delhi. And that is the finding worth carrying, because it names the substitute mechanism precisely: **an order with no settlement has no internal means of lowering its rate, so the only thing that**

can relieve its taxpayers is a successful foreign conquest. Relief is not a policy lever available to the administration; it is a windfall. Which means that from the taxpayer's chair, the single most important variable in his life — whether he pays everything or nothing this year — is determined by events a thousand miles away that he cannot observe, influence or predict.

The rate at the end

Two documents close the account, and both are the successor's.

The first is Adil Shah's accession decree of 1747, which this study has already read as a robe. Read now as a fiscal instrument it is precise: it commands that "the new contributions in money, imposed on subjects and strangers, shall from henceforward cease and be annulled"; it dismisses the collectors and orders them sent to court; it requires crown money already collected to be accounted for; and it forgives **all remaining revenue for the current year and all taxes for the two following years**, so that subjects of Islam and of every other religion, and the Indians and others "who for some years have been subject to every kind of torture and oppression, may enjoy an uninterrupted safety and tranquillity."

A three-year remission is what Nadir had granted in 1739 out of the Mughal treasury. Adil Shah granted the same thing in 1747 out of nothing at all, which tells you what he thought the alternative was. The first act of the new regime was to switch the step function back to zero, and it could not afford to.

The second document is what happened next, and it is the whole extraction question answered from the far side. Within a year Adil Shah's brother Ebrahim was in the field against him, and Hanway describes his position:

> *"There was no possibility of exacting contributions in a country already drained, not of money only, but of almost every thing necessary to the support of life. Many of his soldiers knowing where to find another master, who was reputed rich, deserted."*

That is where the rate ends. Not at an equilibrium, and not at a revolt, but at a country from which nothing further can be taken by anybody, and an army walking off to find a paymaster who still has something. The full demographic and metabolic accounting belongs to a later part of this study, where the evidence for it can be set out properly. What belongs here is the fiscal fact: the extraction did not stop because someone eased it. It stopped because it had reached the bottom of what was there.

Reading extraction against the framework

Three things this case returns to the card, one of them new and two of them specifications.

First, and new: the medium-of-payment clause has a second form. The card, working from colonial hut and poll taxes, treats the requirement of payment in a currency the household does not hold as an instrument for **compelling labour** — the household must send a man out to earn the coin, and the state acquires a labour force without legislating one. Afsharid Iran shows the identical clause operating as an instrument for **compelling liquidation**: where the taxed population's wealth is in stock rather than in labour, a cash assessment forces sale, and where the taxing power is also the only substantial buyer, it sets the price at which its own tax is discharged. The operative question the card poses — *what will be accepted in satisfaction of it?* — is exactly right and should stand; what should be added is the follow-on question, **what must the payer do to obtain that thing, and who controls the terms on which he obtains it?** The answer to the second question is where the real rate lives, and it is invisible in the schedule. A related and quieter version needs no intent at all: a fixed cash assessment in a contracting economy is a rising real rate that no official ever raised, and an administration can believe itself to be holding a line while doubling a burden.

Second, a specification of the "just enough" equilibrium. The card derives the stable point from two dials the extractor turns, and explains it by the extractor's interest in keeping the producer productive. This case shows that the interest in question is **not the ruler's** — it is the *settlement's*. What actually restrains a rate is the existence of men whose positions are claims on future output and who therefore lobby, obstruct, under-report and quietly protect the tax base in their own interest, because their sons will hold the district. Remove them and the equilibrium disappears, even though the ruler's abstract interest in a surviving peasantry is unchanged; abstract interests do not collect taxes. So the equilibrium should be restated as a property of the settlement rather than of the extractor: **an order can only tune its rate through people who lose by the tuning being wrong.** This is the third distinct consequence this study has traced to the same missing instrument, and it should be recorded as compounding rather than as a fresh finding: a ruler who cannot make owners cannot bind his elite, cannot install a belief, and cannot regulate his own extraction.

Third, a testable signature. Where an order is funded by external plunder rather than internal revenue, its extraction will present as a **step function rather than a curve** — periods of remarkable lightness alternating with periods of maximum feasible severity, switching on the arrival or failure of conquests rather than on anything about the taxpayers. Iran between 1739 and 1743 swings from total remission to the recovery

of arrears from the previously exempt inside four years, with no change in the country's capacity to pay in either direction. The signature is worth looking for elsewhere, because it is easy to misread: a historian sampling 1740 will find a benevolent fiscal regime and a historian sampling 1744 will find a rapacious one, and both will be describing the same machine at two settings of a switch that the population had no hand in throwing.

And a concession the evidence requires. It would be wrong to close this module implying that a better administrator could have made the sums work. He could not have. The establishment Nadir maintained was, on the only contemporary figure available, several times the peak revenue of the richest Iranian state of the previous century, levied on a considerably poorer country. No tax system, however designed, would have met it. The extraction was not a policy that went wrong; it was the arithmetical shadow of the army, and the army was the only thing holding the order up. That is the trap in its final form, and it is worth stating without softening: he could not reduce the army, because the army was the arrangement; he could not fund the army from Iran, because Iran did not contain the money; and he could not fund it from abroad indefinitely, because the supply of undefended treasuries within reach was finite and he had already taken the largest one.

A note on sources

Primary quotations are from Jonas Hanway, *An Historical Account of the British Trade over the Caspian Sea… to which are added, the Revolutions of Persia during the present Century* (London, 1753), vol. II, as that public-domain edition prints them: the footnote computing twelve months' pay for 140,000 men at £3,400,000 "at the ordinary computation"; the note giving a Persian commander fifty tomans or £120 a day, which supplies the exchange rate of roughly £2.40 to the toman used above; the description of the Delhi contributions and the sale of effects at a quarter of value for want of any buyers but the Persians; the text of Adil Shah's accession decree of 1747 annulling the new contributions in money, dismissing the collectors and remitting the current year's remaining revenue and the taxes of the two following years; and the account of Ebrahim's position in a country "already drained, not of money only, but of almost every thing necessary to the support of life." Hanway is a hostile, second-hand and metropolitan witness and is used here for what such a witness is good for — administrative measures, prices and computations — rather than for verdicts.

The arithmetic in this module is the study's own and should be treated accordingly. It rests on Hanway's estimate, on Hanway's own exchange rate, and on a comparison with Safavid revenue figures collected from seventeenth-century European observers,

all of whom said the figures were unobtainable; the range given (Thomas Herbert's 357,000 tomans for Abbas I; Engelbert Kaempfer's approximately 400,000 for land revenue; Raphaël Du Mans's "not exceeding 600,000" for Abbas II with his own suggestion that the truth was half that; Jean Chardin's approximately 700,000) is reproduced from the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* article on the Safavid and Qajar fiscal system, along with Du Mans's remark on the unreliability of Persian informants. The comparison spans some seventy years, two currency regimes and a catastrophic intervening collapse, and it is offered as an order-of-magnitude statement rather than a calculation. What can be said with confidence is only the direction: the establishment cost far exceeded any figure ever credibly attributed to Iranian state revenue, and both the army's growth after 1741 and the country's impoverishment after 1722 widen rather than narrow the gap.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited: the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* article on Nader Shah (Ernest Tucker) for the cadastral survey and the *raqabat-e Naderi*, the suspension of the pious foundations, the discontinuation of the *abbasi* and the minting of the silver *Naderi* on the Mughal rupee standard (following Rabino di Borgomale), the reimposition of taxation and the resulting rebellions, and the three-year remission after India; the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* article on commerce in the Safavid and Qajar periods, drawing on Willem Floor, for the near-standstill of international trade in the 1720s, its resumption at a much reduced level, and the loss of purchasing power and rise in traders' costs under Nadir; Rudi Matthee's *The Politics of Trade in Safavid Iran* and *The Monetary History of Iran* for the structural weakness of Iranian bullion supply and the silk-for-silver trade; Ann Lambton's *Landlord and Peasant in Persia* for the tenurial measures; and Kostikyan and Margaryan's published description of Nadir's *farman* to the merchants of Agulis (Matenadaran, folder 1g, doc. 1288, December 1742 – January 1743) for the intensification of collection in 1742–43 and the recovery of arrears from previously exempt groups. Willem Floor's *The Rise and Fall of Nader Shah: Dutch East India Company Reports, 1730–1747* corroborates the fiscal picture independently from the Dutch archive.

The remission after India is given in both the forms the record supplies — one year from 10 March 1739 in Hanway's contemporary report, three years in most later accounts. Figures for the Delhi plunder are given as conventional rather than established. No quotation, date, attribution or figure has been reconstructed from memory, and where the record will not support a number this module says so rather than supplying one. The demographic and metabolic accounting is deferred to the module built to carry it.

AFTER THE CAUCASUS

Module 7 · Information and Suppression — a court secretary's dividing line that has organised the record for two hundred and fifty years, an unofficial chronicler who said in writing what a strangled cleric had said out loud, and a channel out of the country that the strongest man in Asia never even tried to close

The pair

This case hands the analyst something the corpus rarely gets: two full-length narrative accounts of the same eleven years, written by contemporaries, one commissioned and one not.

The official history is the *Tarikh-i jahangusha-yi Naderi* of Mirza Mahdi Khan Astarabadi, who was Nadir's own secretary and court historiographer, travelled with him, and wrote while he was alive — though the text was put into final form in the 1750s, after the man was dead. It circulated very widely: an abridged English version by William Jones appeared in 1773, a French one in 1770, and in the Qajar period it went through something like fourteen Persian editions.

The unofficial account is the *Tarikh-i 'alam-ara-yi Naderi* of Muhammad Kazim Marvi, a functionary at Merv, written outside the court and after the assassination.

Set beside them is a third body of evidence that neither chronicler knew was accumulating, and it is the most surprising thing in this module: an uninterrupted stream of reports about Nadir flowing out of Iran to Europe in near-real time, through Dutch and English Company servants, Jesuit and Carmelite missionaries, and the diplomatic posts at Istanbul, Vienna and Moscow. He never closed it. So far as the record shows, he never tried.

The partition

Start with what the official history does, because it is not what a modern reader expects a court history to do. It does not deny the atrocities of the last years. It concedes them, in detail, and then relocates their cause.

The device is a **dividing line**. Astarabadi organises the reign so that everything up to the Caucasus expedition is the deliverance of Iran — the Afghans expelled, the Ottomans driven back, the Russians brought to terms, the empire reassembled — and everything after it is something else. The line falls in 1741–42, at the assassination

attempt near Derbent and the blinding of Reza Qoli, and the effect of placing it there is that the shah of the first half and the shah of the second are, in a manner the text never quite has to argue, not the same person.

Read the end of the abridgement that reached European readers and watch the machinery work. Nadir hears that Taqi Khan, to whom he had assigned the government of Fars, has declared himself independent "of his benefactor," and that other governors have followed:

> *"This intelligence drove him to a degree of fury, which can scarce be conceived: he put to death a great number of his governors and ministers, upon the slightest suspicion of their guilt; and, not satisfied with destroying the leaders of the rebellion, he cut off whole cities, and forced the greatest number of his subjects to seek a refuge in the mountains and deserts. After he had celebrated the Nuruz in the city of Kerman, he advanced to Meshed, which he found in a manner deserted, and the whole province ripe for revolt: his madness was now raised to the highest pitch."*

Every fact in that passage is damning and every fact is admitted. Cities destroyed. The population driven into the mountains and deserts — which is precisely what the independent European reporting also describes. Mashhad, his own capital, empty. And then the operative clause, which does all the work: **his madness**.

That is not concealment. It is a diagnosis, and a diagnosis is a far more useful instrument than a lie, for three reasons. It does not require anybody to disbelieve what they have seen, which in 1747 would have been hopeless. It leaves the achievements of the first half fully intact, because a man does not become retrospectively less of a general by going mad afterwards. And it removes the events from the domain of policy altogether: a policy can be criticised, and criticising it implies an alternative and therefore a critic with standing, whereas an illness can only be regretted.

The secretary had an exact problem and this is an exact solution to it. His master had reassembled the country and then wrecked it, and Astarabadi needed a version in which the reassembling remained creditable. The dividing line delivers that, and it costs nothing, because by the time the final text was fixed the patient was dead.

The failure reclassified

The same instrument is applied, in the other direction, to the great failure of the reign, and here the operation is even neater.

Nadir had spent eleven years demanding that the Ottomans recognise the Ja'fari *madhhab* and grant a pillar for its imam at the Ka'ba, and had abandoned both

demands in the treaty of 1746 without obtaining either. In the version that reached the European reading public through Jones, that decade is explained as follows. The three procedural articles are straightforward; as for the religious ones, the reader is told that it seems difficult at first to assign a reasonable motive for them, but that on a nearer view we discover the great sagacity and foresight of this extraordinary man. He never intended a perpetual peace, but was not disposed to fight the Turks while the Afghans were gathering strength at Kandahar and revolts were breaking out at home. He therefore

> *"determined... to amuse them and keep them in play, by proposing terms of religion, to which he knew those superstitious zealots would never consent; while their refusal would at any time supply him with a plausible pretence for declaring war."*

And when the demands are dropped in 1747, the text simply notes that he abandoned the two articles relating to the mosque at Mecca, "which, as we observed before, were only intended to amuse the Turks before the expedition against Candahar."

A defeat has become a stratagem. The thing he could not obtain is reclassified as the thing he never wanted, and the eleven years of embassies, the war of 1743, the council convened at Najaf and the *fatwa* condemning the *madhhab* as heresy are folded into a single explanation in which he was in control the whole time.

Whether that gloss belongs to Astarabadi or to Jones cannot be settled from the English text alone, and this study does not pretend otherwise. But the shape of the manoeuvre is the same as the partition, run the other way. The partition relocates the crimes from policy into pathology; the reclassification relocates the failure from incapacity into cunning. Both preserve the one thing a court history exists to preserve, which is the competence and standing of the man it is about, and both do it without denying a single verifiable event.

What Marvi said instead

Now the unofficial chronicler, and the difference between them is precisely where the framework predicts it will be.

Marvi is not hostile. He praises Nadir's military prowess in much the same terms as Astarabadi does; nobody who lived through the 1730s was in any doubt that the man could fight. What he does differently is the one thing the official history cannot do: **he**

casts doubt on Nadir's right to rule, on the ground that genuine legitimacy continued to belong to the descendants of the Safavids.

Hold that beside the founding scene of the reign. At the Mughan assembly in February 1736 the *mullabashi*, Mirza Abu'l-Hasan, was reported to have remarked that everyone was for the Safavid dynasty, and was arrested and strangled. Marvi, writing a decade later from Merv with the man dead, put substantially that proposition into a book. The strangling did not settle the question; it postponed the writing down of the answer by eleven years.

That is what an interpreter class looks like when it has been decapitated but not replaced. Nadir killed the office-holder, expropriated the endowments that funded the class, and installed nothing in their place. What he therefore had was not a captured seam but an unstaffed one, and an unstaffed seam produces exactly this: no authorised interpretation being taught anywhere, and the old interpretation surviving unfunded, unsupervised and unrefuted, waiting for a moment when saying it out loud was survivable.

The poet who changed course

One further witness, because he is the clearest demonstration in the case of what a purchased robe is worth once the payments stop.

A poet named Mohammad Ali Tusi, who styled himself the second Ferdowsi, composed a *Shahnameh-ye Naderi* — an epic in the manner of the national epic, glorifying Nadir's exploits including the Indian campaign. It is a commissioned instrument of the most direct kind: the conqueror inserted into the frame of Persian kingship by the oldest and most prestigious literary form available.

After Nadir's death the same poet changed course and vilified him for the devastation he had wrought.

There is nothing unusual in a court poet following the money, and the point is not to convict him of anything. The point is structural, and it is the same point this study has now made from four directions. A robe that must be paid for weekly is not a robe; it is a service contract, and it terminates. Formation is what a person cannot easily stop believing when the payments stop, because it was installed before he was old enough to notice, and Nadir had installed none.

The channel he never closed

Now the finding that genuinely surprised the research, because it inverts the expectation the colonial cases in this corpus have built up.

Those cases produced a seam running between a metropole and a colony, policed hard, because the whole enterprise depended on the home audience not seeing plainly what the floor was doing. Afsharid Iran had a seam of a sort — the domestic proclamation that did not mention the Safavids while the foreign letters did — but it had, running straight through it, a parallel information system that Nadir did not control and made no discoverable effort to control.

The scale of it is startling. Tahmasp Qoli Khan, as he still was, appears in the European press by 1730, routed via Istanbul, Vienna and Moscow, and reaches American colonial newspapers in the same year. The *Mercure de France* of November 1731 carried an eyewitness report presenting him as a saviour. A seven-hundred-and-seventy-page German volume depicting him as the divinely inspired rescuer of a collapsed nation appeared in 1738. The earliest narrative of the Indian campaign appears to have been written in 1739 by Dutch East India Company agents in Bengal, published in Holland in 1740, and translated into English, Italian and Spanish within a year. James Fraser's *History of Nadir Shah* came out in 1742, based largely on the reports of William Cockell, an English Company agent who had served in Iran while Nadir was in power. The Jesuits' *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses* carried a section on the revolutions in Persia in 1741. The first French play about his death was written in 1752, five years after it happened; the first novel featuring him in 1754.

Set that beside what he *did* suppress, in the same years, and the asymmetry is almost comic. When somebody wrote a pointed couplet on the walls of the mausoleum he was building at Mashhad — observing that his renown filled every corner of the earth but that his place here was very empty — severe inquisition was made, many *mullahs* were brought to trial, and some were whipped until they died. A man who joked that the higher a fountain throws its water the faster it falls was executed for it. Hanway's summary is that Nadir never lacked the base instruments of tyranny to acquaint him with the minutest actions.

So the apparatus was real, energetic and lethal — and pointed entirely inward, at Persian speech in Persian towns, while Dutch merchants in Bengal published a narrative of his Indian campaign that went into four languages inside two years.

The framework asks, of an order answering to a distant audience, whether the seam is held open by concealment or by indifference. This is a third case: **held open by irrelevance.** Nadir was not indifferent to what was said about him — he killed people for epigrams. He was indifferent to what was said about him *in languages spoken by people who could not put a rival on his throne*. European opinion could not produce a Safavid claimant, could not withhold recognition that mattered, and could not raise a

tax revolt in Fars. It was therefore not worth a single soldier, and it was left entirely alone.

That is a rational allocation, and it has a general form worth stating: an apex suppresses information in exact proportion to the audience's capacity to act on it, which means the *geography* of a suppression apparatus maps the apex's own estimate of who can hurt him. Nadir's map is legible in a sentence. He feared a mullah in Mashhad with a piece of chalk and did not fear a printing press in Amsterdam.

The broadcast

The other half of the suppression question is what was done to those who could hurt him, and here the case tests a finding the corpus developed elsewhere.

The instrument was the tower of heads, raised across the provinces in the last years in conscious imitation of Timur, whose skull-towers Nadir had studied and whose title he carried on his Indian coinage. Adil Shah's accession decree — the successor's justification, and to be read as such — describes the late shah as having "barbarously erected lofty towers of human heads through the provinces, exceeding all the cruelties of past ages," alongside the blinding of inhabitants and the selling of the sons and daughters of Muslims. Hanway, reproducing it, adds that he had heard the number blinded was not less than thirty thousand, "but this seems to be exaggerated" — a footnote worth keeping for the discipline it shows.

The Mexica case in this corpus produced the finding that **broadcast terror is the tell of an order with no garrison**: a state able to station troops in every district does not need to leave monuments in the ones it has left. That holds here exactly, and this case adds a timing to it. Nadir's field army was enormous throughout, and almost always somewhere else — in Daghestan, in Iraq, on the Ottoman frontier. The towers are a *late* instrument, belonging to the same years as the passport regime imposed on the road-posts. Broadcast terror and exit control appear together, in the 1740s, in a reign that had run for years without either, and both are substitutes for the same missing thing, which is presence. A ruler who could be in the district would not need to leave a monument in it or a checkpoint on the road out.

The war over the corpse

The interpretive battle did not end when the floor did, and its later history is the strongest evidence in this module for what the official history actually accomplished.

The immediate successors tried to erase him. Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar, founding a dynasty that needed Safavid Shi'i credentials it did not possess, staged his

own coronation on the Mughan plain sixty years after Nadir's — and then distanced himself sharply, blaming Nadir for having deviated from the Shi'i foundations the Qajars were invoking, destroying his sepulchre beside the Imam Reza shrine at Mashhad, and having the body reburied, first at Tehran and later at Najaf. A German traveller reports that a later Qajar shah had the bones placed under his door-posts so that he might tread on them each time he left the palace.

And it did not work, because the book was still there. Astarabadi's history ran through something like fourteen Persian editions under the Qajars — a dynasty whose founder had dug up the author's master. When Iranians in the nineteenth century, smarting under Russian defeats, went looking for a strong ruler in their recent past, the account they found waiting was the one the secretary had written. When John Malcolm produced the first modern Western history of Persia, he ascribed the bloodletting of the last years to creeping insanity — Astarabadi's partition, arriving in English. When Malcolm's book was translated at Bombay in 1873 and became, in Lambton's report of a village headman in 1934, "the last word on the history of his country," the partition came home in Persian. When Abbas Eqbal Ashtiyani wrote his authoritative history in the 1930s, he described a ruler who had served his country well until the Indian campaign, when cruelty and greed overtook him. Iranian school textbooks today hail the warrior who drove out the foreign usurpers and treat the Indian bloodshed as an aberration.

Two hundred and fifty years after a court secretary drew a line through his master's reign to protect the first half of it, the line is still where it was.

Reading information against the framework

The framework's account of the seam holds here, and the case returns two additions and one confirmation.

The first addition is the periodisation device, and it should be added to the card as a thing to look for. The corpus's existing instruction is to read the surviving sources against the grain, on the understanding that they are usually the robe rather than the floor, and to take incidental detail over central claim. That is right and it works. What this case adds is a specific and very common structural manoeuvre that operates *without any false statement at all*: **where a court history partitions a reign into a virtuous phase and a degenerate phase, treat the partition as an instrument rather than an observation, and ask whether the dividing line falls where the evidence is or where the chronicler's problem is.** Its function is always the same — it preserves the legitimacy and the competence by relocating the crimes from the domain of policy, where they could be criticised and where criticism implies an alternative, into

the domain of pathology, where they can only be regretted. The mirror-image move applies the same logic to failures, reclassifying what could not be obtained as what was never wanted; Jones's rendering has Nadir proposing terms of religion he knew the Ottomans would never accept, purely "to amuse them and keep them in play."

The second addition is more consequential and it concerns how a robe wins the long run. The framework says an apex governs belief by holding the chokepoint between people and the knowledge they cannot check. Nadir held no such chokepoint. He had killed the interpreter class's head and defunded the class, so there was no staffed seam to work; and a parallel European channel carried detailed reports of his conduct out of his territory continuously and beyond his reach. By every measure of control he lost the information war comprehensively while he was alive — and his version won anyway.

It won because he was the only party who commissioned a complete account. Marvi wrote one too, but Marvi was a provincial functionary with no press behind him; the Europeans wrote pamphlets, plays and travel narratives rather than a chronology; the ulama he had expropriated wrote polemic. Astarabadi produced the single structured, dated, comprehensive narrative of the eleven years, and every subsequent constituency that needed a usable past — Qajar readers wanting a strong ruler, British imperial historians wanting a precursor, Pahlavi nation-builders wanting a unifier, modern textbook writers wanting a liberator — reached for the account that was lying there, and inherited its architecture along with its facts.

So the card should carry this alongside the existing instruction: **an order that cannot police the seam in its own lifetime can still determine what is remembered, by being the only party that writes the whole thing down.** Over the short run, suppression governs. Over the long run, **completeness beats suppression**, because history is written by whoever left a usable narrative, and a usable narrative is a scarce good that partisans of every later persuasion will pick up and carry. The analytic instruction that follows is uncomfortable and worth stating plainly: where a single commissioned chronicle dominates a period's historiography, the danger is not that its facts are false — they are usually checkable and often true — but that its *shape* has been silently adopted by everyone since, including by scholars who despise its subject.

And the confirmation. Broadcast terror is the tell of an order with no garrison, as the Mexica case found; this case adds that it appears *late*, alongside exit control, and that the two are substitutes for the same missing thing. A ruler who can be in the district needs neither a checkpoint on the road out nor a monument in the square. This study has now watched three instruments arrive together in the 1740s — the passports, the towers, the informers — and they are not three symptoms of a man's

deterioration. They are one order's response to having run out of the only currency it had, which was presence.

A note on sources

The two chronicles at the centre of this module are Mirza Mahdi Khan Astarabadi's *Tarikh-i jahangusha-yi Naderi* and Muhammad Kazim Marvi's *Tarikh-i 'alam-ara-yi Naderi*. Direct quotation here is confined to the public-domain English abridgement of the first, published by William Jones as *The History of the Life of Nader Shah, King of Persia* (London, 1773): the account of the revolt of Taqi Khan and its aftermath, ending "his madness was now raised to the highest pitch"; the explanation that the religious articles were proposed to "amuse them and keep them in play, by proposing terms of religion, to which he knew those superstitious zealots would never consent"; and the note at the 1747 peace that the two articles relating to the mosque at Mecca "were only intended to amuse the Turks before the expedition against Candahar." Jones's text is an abridgement with editorial framing, and whether these glosses render Astarabadi or represent Jones's own interpretation cannot be established from the English alone; the text says so at the point of use, and the analytic point made there does not depend on which it is.

Ernest Tucker's "Explaining Nadir Shah: Kingship and Royal Legitimacy in Muhammad Kazim Marvi's *Tarikh-i 'alam-ara-yi Nadiri*" (*Iranian Studies* 26, 1993) is the authority for Marvi's position that legitimacy continued to adhere to the Safavid line, and Tucker's chapter on eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century historiography in Melville, ed., *Persian Historiography* (2012) for the chroniclers' general posture. Rudi Matthee's "The wrath of God or national hero? Nader Shah in European and Iranian historiography" (*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 2023) is the authority for almost all of the reception history used here and is paraphrased and credited throughout: Astarabadi's creation of the impression that Nadir changed only after the Caucasus expedition, at which point he had blinded Reza Qoli; Marvi's contrasting position; Mohammad Ali Tusi's *Shahnameh-ye Naderi* and his change of course after Nadir's death; the appearance of Nadir in the European and American press from 1730 and in the *Mercure de France* of November 1731; David Fassmann's 770-page German volume of 1738; the Dutch Company narrative of the Indian campaign written in Bengal in 1739, published in Holland in 1740 and translated into English, Italian and Spanish; James Fraser's *History of Nadir Shah* (1742) resting largely on the reports of the Company agent William Cockell; the section in the *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses* of 1741; the French play of 1752 and the novels of 1754 and 1758; Agha Mohammad Khan's coronation on the Mughan plain, his repudiation of Nadir, the destruction of

the sepulchre at Mashhad and the reburials at Tehran and Najaf, together with Moritz Wagner's report of the bones under the door-posts; the roughly fourteen Qajar editions of Astarabadi's history; Malcolm's ascription of the last years to creeping insanity and the Bombay translation of 1873; Ann Lambton's report of the village headman in 1934; Abbas Eqbal Ashtiyani's account of the 1930s; and the treatment in current Iranian school textbooks. Abbas Amanat's work on the *Shahnameh-ye Naderi* is cited there and is the further authority for that text.

Quotations from Jonas Hanway are from *An Historical Account of the British Trade over the Caspian Sea* (London, 1753), vol. II, as that public-domain edition prints them: the inquisition over the couplet written on the walls of the Mashhad mausoleum and the *mullahs* whipped to death; the execution of the man who joked about the fountain; the remark that Nadir "never wanted the base instruments of tyranny to acquaint him of the minutest actions"; and the text of Adil Shah's accession decree with its reference to towers of human heads erected through the provinces, together with Hanway's own sceptical footnote on the reported thirty thousand blinded. Hanway is hostile and second-hand, and the accession decree is the incoming regime's justification for a coup; both are read as such. The reported remark of the *mullabashi* Mirza Abu'l-Hasan at Mughan reaches the record through Lockhart from the chronicle tradition and is treated as a report of speech rather than a documented text.

No quotation, date, attribution or figure has been reconstructed from memory. The demographic accounting, the elite fracture, and the assassination of 1747 are treated in the modules built to carry them.

THEY TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THEIR STATIONS

Module 8 · Elite Coordination and the Default — the audit of the hierarchy above the priced commoner; the first full case in this corpus of divide-and-balance; and the night on which the men who held the only positions in the empire discovered that their positions were about to be withdrawn

What the default is, and what is being audited

The default is not a theory. It is an observation about hierarchies that lasted, and the observation is this: in a durable arrangement, each man inside it defends the whole thing by defending his own position, because his position *is* a share of the whole. He does not need to be told, does not need to like the men he is coordinating with, and does not need to believe anything in particular. He needs only to notice that if the arrangement falls he loses what he holds. The sum of a great many private self-defences is the maintenance of the order, and no cabal is required, because the structure is already doing the work a cabal would have to do.

The corollary is where fracture comes from. A group with **standing and means** that stops benefiting from the arrangement stops defending it — and, having standing and means, is in a position to do rather more than stop.

What this module audits is therefore not the peasant, who was priced in the cost column, but the hierarchy above him: the officers, the governors, the tribal khans, the household, the men who actually operate the apparatus of rule. The question is asked of each in turn, and the answer to it is the state of the order.

The audit, class by class

The provincial governors. Nadir governed through appointees of his own choosing rather than through an inherited bureaucracy, moved between Mashhad, Kalat and the field camp rather than sitting in a capital, intervened personally in collections, ordered specific remittances from named provinces, and executed treasury officials for shortfalls. A governor under this system held a revocable commission and a personal liability. He could not pass his district to his son, could not accumulate a following in it without inviting suspicion, and could be destroyed for a bad harvest. If

the arrangement fell tomorrow, he lost a job he expected to lose anyway and escaped a debt he could not pay. The most instructive case is Mohammad Taqi Khan Shirazi, governor of Fars, a friend of Nadir's since 1730 and one of his declared favourites, who revolted in January 1744. The official history's own phrasing, in the version that reached English readers, is that he "declared himself independent of his benefactor" — which is exactly right and exactly the problem. A benefactor is not a warrant. Benefaction can be withdrawn, and a man who holds only benefaction holds nothing.

The tribal khans. These were the men who came with armed followings, and they are the class a settlement is normally built to buy. Nadir did not buy them; he broke them and redistributed their people. Fath Ali Khan Qajar, who had brought him into Tahmasp's service, was executed within weeks. The Karabakh houses that opposed his elevation at Mughan were punished and displaced. Ali Morad the Bakhtiari was hunted into a cave, blinded, mutilated and killed, some three thousand of his families were seized, thousands were deported to Khorasan, and the remainder were enlisted. What that policy produces is not a coordinating class but a supply of manpower — and, importantly, a set of men who remember. Karim Khan Zand was a Lak deported by Nadir to Khorasan to serve in his army, and he led his people home the moment Nadir was dead.

The officer corps. The professional core of the army was paid, and paid well, in cash. Salaries in place of land tenure was policy, pursued deliberately. An officer therefore held no estate, no district, no heritable claim, and nothing whatever that survived either his own dismissal or the shah's death. What he had was a *station* — a place in the household, a command, a degree of proximity — and stations of that kind exist only in the mind of the man who confers them.

The family. Nadir did what a founder does and put his blood in the great commands: his brother Ebrahim Khan in Azerbaijan, his son Reza Qoli made governor of Khorasan at seventeen on the day of the coronation and left as regent during the Indian campaign, with a Safavid marriage to link the lineages and a grandson named after Timur's son. That is a real attempt at a dynastic settlement and it is the nearest thing in the reign to one. He then destroyed it himself. Ebrahim was killed in Daghestan in 1738. Reza Qoli was blinded in 1742 on the word of a would-be assassin. And his nephew Ali Qoli rose in revolt two months before the assassination, took the throne afterwards as Adil Shah, and killed every one of Nadir's sons and grandsons but one.

The interpreter class. Expropriated, decapitated, and not replaced. A class stripped of its endowments has no position to defend and a standing grievance to settle.

So the audit returns the same answer at every link, and the answer is not merely "no". It is worse than no. At most links the honest answer is that the man in question would be **better off** if the arrangement fell — provided only that Nadir was dead first, since he was the only party capable of enforcing the arrangement and also the only party who benefited from it.

An order in that condition is not a hierarchy at all in the framework's sense. It is one man with an army, and a very large number of people waiting.

Classifying the case against the Menu

The card's Menu offers six solution-families to the open problem. Afsharid Iran runs one of them almost purely, and it happens to be the family the card names but has not yet been able to examine in a full case.

Not **Export**: there was no outlet and no surplus of claimants to send down it. Not **Prevent by outsider recruitment**: he did recruit outsiders in enormous numbers, but the Ottoman version of that solution pairs outsider recruitment with a system of assignments that revert to the state on death — it *gives* the outsider a position and then makes it non-heritable. Nadir gave no positions at all, which is a different thing and, as this study has traced, a consequential one. Not **Rotate by merit**, which requires an examined path and a bureaucracy to rotate men through. Not **Assume the chair**, which was foreclosed: the Safavid warrant was vested in a bloodline, and a bloodline has no seat a stranger can occupy. And only marginally **Co-opt**, which he attempted within his own family and then dismantled with his own hands.

What he ran was **Divide and balance**, and he ran it at the level of the coercive class. The army was deliberately composed across every ethnic and confessional line available — Afshar, Qajar, Kurd, Bakhtiari, Lur, Arab, Baluch, Georgian, Armenian, Abdali and Ghilzai Afghan, Uzbek — and the standard reading of why is that a mixed force competes with itself for favour and cannot easily combine against the man at the top. No bloc within it can grow decisive, because another bloc can always be raised against it. It is a real and intelligent answer to the open problem, and for eleven years it worked: no faction of his army ever combined against him, and the one that eventually did had to do it with fifteen men in the dark.

This study therefore offers Afsharid Iran as the corpus's first full instance of that family, and the value of the case is that it ran the family to destruction and shows precisely where the failure is.

Why this balance could not hold

The card's named exemplar of divide-and-balance is the Roman Republic — paired consulships, fixed terms, a tribunate set against the magistracies. Set that beside Nadir's army and the difference is not one of degree.

What Rome balanced were **offices**. A consulship existed independently of whoever held it, had a defined term, was conferred by a procedure nobody personally controlled, and would exist next year whatever happened to this year's consul. A man who lost the contest lost a year, not his life, and could stand again. The balance was between positions that outlived their occupants, which meant that every player had an interest in the *system of positions* continuing, quite separately from his interest in his own current standing. That interest is the default, and it is what makes divide-and-balance survivable.

What Nadir balanced were **favours**. The Abdali contingent's standing relative to the Afshar contingent was not fixed by any rule, recorded in any instrument, or guaranteed by anything outside his head. It was a current estimate of his preference, revisable without notice and without appeal, and it had no existence apart from him.

Three consequences follow, and together they are the module's finding.

First, every reallocation becomes a survival question. Where positions are institutional, a faction that loses ground has lost a round. Where positions are favours, a faction that loses ground has lost the only thing standing between it and destruction, because there is no office to retreat into, no term to wait out, and no procedure to appeal to. The disfavoured are not disappointed; they are exposed.

Second, the ruler loses the ability to adjust his own coalition. This is the trap and it is not obvious. A ruler with an institutional elite can promote one faction and demote another as circumstances require, because demotion is survivable and everyone knows it. A ruler balancing favours cannot, because any visible shift toward one contingent is legible to the other as the opening move of its elimination — and the reading is often correct. So the instrument that was supposed to give him freedom of manoeuvre takes it away. He may balance, but he may not *re*-balance.

Third, the arrangement is self-detonating rather than merely fragile. The better the balancing works, the more completely each faction's existence depends on his continuing favour, and the more catastrophic any change in that favour becomes. Success in this family increases the payoff to a pre-emptive strike by whichever group reads the signals first.

Stated generally: **divide-and-balance is stable only where the things being balanced have an existence independent of the balancer.** Balance offices and you can get five centuries; balance favourites and you get one night. And the variable that

decides which you are doing is the one this study has now met at every level — whether the ruler can convey anything that outlives his conveying it.

Fathabad

The night of 19–20 June 1747, at the camp at Fathabad near Quchan in Khorasan, is the finding made flesh, and the documentation is unusually good because Nadir's own physician was in the camp.

Père Louis Bazin, the French Jesuit who attended him, reported what had happened in a letter published in the *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, and John Malcolm reproduces the substance of it in a footnote:

> *"The physician Bazin states, that Nadir had informed the chief of the Affghans that he entirely reposed on the fidelity of his corps, and that he meant they should next day seize and imprison all the officers of his guards."*

Read that sentence slowly, because everything in this module is inside it. The shah tells one contingent of his balanced army that he relies entirely on its fidelity, and that in the morning it is to arrest the officers of the other. The chapter headings of Malcolm's own narrative give the sequence with brutal economy: *Proposes to put to death every Persian in his army. His intention is known, and a plot is formed against him. He is murdered.*

What followed is the ordinary arithmetic of men reading a ledger:

> *"Some of the principal officers of his court, who learnt that their names were in the list of proscribed victims, resolved to save themselves by the assassination of Nadir. The execution of the plot was committed to four persons, among whom was Mahomed Aly Khan, a chief of his own tribe of Affshar, and Salah Beg, the captain of his guards. These chiefs took advantage of their stations, and, under the pretext of urgent business, rushed past the guards into the inner tents, where the tyrant was asleep. The noise awoke him; and he had slain two of the meaner assassins, when a blow from Salah Beg deprived him of existence."*

Other accounts name the principals slightly differently — Mohammad Qoli Khan Qereqlu, captain of the personal guard, and Salah Khan, overseer of the household, both of them Nadir's own relatives and of his own Qereqlu Afshar clan — and put the number who entered the enclosure at around fifteen rather than four. Bazin's fuller account, which rests partly on the testimony of Chuki, one of Nadir's concubines, describes a body of conspirators arriving early at the meeting place. The details vary; the structure does not. And Adil Shah's own accession decree, issued weeks later, states it

from the other side, recording that he commanded Mohammad Qoli Khan, his *qurchi-bashi*, to prevail upon the Afshar guards to seize and remove the tyrant.

Four things in that sequence are worth isolating, because each of them is a framework finding arriving on a specific date.

The killers were the innermost circle. Not a provincial rebel, not a disaffected tribe, not a foreign faction — the captain of his guard and the overseer of his household, men of his own clan and his own blood. The card's warning is that the chain's weakest link is frequently at the top rather than the bottom, and this is that proposition in its extreme form. In an order where nobody holds anything, the men who hold the most are the men closest to the ruler's person, and their holdings are therefore the most instantly revocable and the most lethally placed.

Their stations were the murder weapon. Malcolm's phrase is exact — *they took advantage of their stations* — and it is the sentence this module is named for. The only thing Nadir had ever given them was access to him. It was not property, not office, not title, not anything they could have defended in his absence; it was proximity. And proximity is the one form of holding that is worth *more* when the arrangement is about to end than while it stands.

They struck because they were losing, and they knew the schedule. This is the fracture condition in its cleanest form: a group with standing and means that has stopped benefiting. The Afshar and Qajar officers had watched their standing shrink as Nadir's trust moved toward the Sunni Afghan and Uzbek contingents through the 1740s, and on that night they learned the endpoint. There is nothing mysterious about the psychology and nothing pathological about the decision. The line the tradition preserves — that they resolved to breakfast off him before he should sup off them — is a cost-benefit calculation stated by the men doing the calculating, and whether or not those were anybody's actual words, the reasoning is not in doubt, because the alternative was arrest at first light.

And the favoured faction was no more use to him than the disfavoured. The Abdali Afghans, the contingent whose fidelity he had just declared he reposed upon entirely, were kept out of the plot deliberately and were posted at the camp defences. On hearing what had happened, Ahmad Khan Abdali went to the royal tent, found the body and the severed head, and — by the tradition his own successors preserved — wept at having failed him. Then he took the Afghan contingent and a portion of the treasure and rode east to Kandahar, where his fellow chiefs elected him and he founded the state that became Afghanistan.

That last is the module's sharpest single observation, and it should be stated plainly. **The disfavoured faction killed him and the favoured faction left with the**

treasury, and the arrangement ended identically either way. Loyalty purchased by favour and disloyalty produced by its withdrawal have the same value at the moment of death, which is none — because in both cases what the man held was a relation to a person, and the person had stopped existing. There was nothing for the loyal Afghan to defend by staying, any more than there was anything for the disloyal Afshar to lose by striking. That is what an order with no default looks like at the instant it is tested.

Fatal, or merely fatal then?

One question has to be faced honestly, because the alternative is to make this look easier than it was.

Could Nadir have done otherwise? The framework's discipline is that the position lights the logic and the person chooses, and the position here was genuinely narrow. He held no warrant, so — as this study has argued — grants made on his authority would have been priced at his life expectancy and would have manufactured independently endowed rivals rather than defenders. Divide-and-balance was, given that, a rational selection from a short menu. And for eleven years it did what he needed: no combination formed against him while he could still pay and still win.

But the choice within the family was his, and there was one available and he did not take it. The one durable position conveyed in the entire reign — the Georgian crowns granted to Teimuraz and Erekle in 1744 — worked precisely because it was a real office with a warrant of its own, confirmed by a church in its own cathedral by its own rite. Nadir had, in principle, the option of building or confirming more such things: offices with defined content, conferred by procedures he did not personally embody, in which a man could lose favour without losing his life. Every one of them would have cost him a measure of control. Every one of them would have created somebody who could survive his displeasure — and that, from inside his position, is exactly what made them intolerable, and exactly what would have made them work.

So the honest formulation is that the arrangement was not doomed by arithmetic alone. It was doomed by a preference that his position made overwhelmingly attractive: **the preference for control over durability.** A ruler who cannot bear to create a man who could survive his anger cannot create a man who will defend his order.

Reading elite coordination against the framework

Four things, one of them the study's principal contribution.

First, and the substantive addition: divide-and-balance gets its first full case, and the case supplies the family's failure mode. The card names the family with

Roman instances and flags it as not yet run. Afsharid Iran runs it to destruction and isolates the variable, which is **not** the degree of fragmentation but the *ontological status of the fragments*. Where the things balanced are institutions with independent existence — offices with terms, conferred by procedures, surviving their holders — the family is among the most durable on the card, because every player acquires an interest in the system of positions that is separable from his interest in his current standing, and that separable interest is the default. Where the things balanced are personal favours, the family is the *least* durable, because the balance has no anchor outside the balancer: every reallocation becomes an existential threat to the losing side, the ruler forfeits the ability to re-balance without triggering a pre-emptive strike, and the arrangement's stability decays in proportion to its own success. Two orders can look identical on an organisation chart and sit at opposite ends of the corpus. The diagnostic to add is a single question, asked of any balanced elite: **does a faction that loses this round still have something next year?**

Second, a condition the card does not name: under-production of positions. The card treats elite overproduction as the standing pressure the open problem generates — more claimants formed than chairs to seat them, discharging outward through a frontier or inward as fracture. Afsharid Iran presents the inverse and it is not the same thing as a healthy equilibrium. There was no surplus of claimants competing for scarce chairs, because there were no chairs. Every man's standing was a personal relation to the apex, which means the pressure did not build up in a class and did not need an outlet; it sat, undischarged and undischargeable, in the private ledger of each individual, waiting for the moment when his personal calculation flipped. That produces a different signature from overproduction — not factional agitation building over years toward a rupture, but an order that appears entirely stable and then is destroyed in a night by fifteen men, because nothing was ever accumulating anywhere to be observed. **Where positions do not exist, fracture has no warning period.**

Third, the audit confirms what the card says about where to look. The weakest link was at the top: the captain of the guard and the overseer of the household, of the ruler's own clan. And the mechanism was the framework's own — the fracture came from the group with standing and means that had stopped benefiting, which in this case was the group that had once benefited most.

Fourth, and this is compounding rather than a new finding, the whole module is the same failure appearing for the fourth time. He could not bind his elite, could not install a belief, could not regulate his extraction, and could not survive his own succession, and all four are the single consequence of holding nothing conveyable. The card should record that these are not four independent variables that happened to fail

together in one case. In a ruler without a warrant they are one variable, and this study is the demonstration.

And a refusal to close. The temptation with a scene like Fathabad is to read it as the end of a story about a man's deterioration — his madness raised to its highest pitch, the paranoia curdling into a proscription list, the tyrant killed in his tent by men he had driven to it. That reading is available, it is the one his own secretary built, and it has organised the historiography for two hundred and fifty years. This study declines it, not because Nadir was well — he plainly was not, and Bazin was watching him die — but because the structural account predicts the same night without needing the illness. An order in which nobody holds anything is an order in which the ruler must eventually suspect everybody, because suspicion is the only instrument he has left once the payments stop; and in which any suspicion he acts upon is, to its object, a death sentence with no appeal; and in which the men best placed to act on that knowledge are the ones he keeps closest. Put a healthy man in that chair in 1747, with the treasure spent, the provinces in revolt, and the Ottoman war concluded without the thing he wanted, and the arithmetic on the guard officers' side of the tent does not change.

A note on sources

Primary quotation in this module is from Sir John Malcolm, *The History of Persia, from the Most Early Period to the Present Time* (London, 1815), vol. II, as that public-domain edition prints it: the marginal headings recording that Nadir proposed to put to death every Persian in his army, that his intention was known and a plot formed, and that he was murdered; the narrative of the officers who "learnt that their names were in the list of proscribed victims," the naming of Mahomed Aly Khan of Nadir's own Afshar tribe and Salah Beg the captain of his guards, and the sentence that "these chiefs took advantage of their stations"; and Malcolm's footnote reporting the testimony of Père Louis Bazin, Nadir's physician, that Nadir "had informed the chief of the Affghans that he entirely reposed on the fidelity of his corps, and that he meant they should next day seize and imprison all the officers of his guards," citing the *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, vol. IV, p. 313. Bazin's letter is the closest thing to an eyewitness source for the conspiracy's trigger and reaches this study through Malcolm rather than from the original, which is stated here rather than concealed. Malcolm is a British envoy writing in 1815 with his own purposes — this study has elsewhere shown him carrying the court historian's partition of the reign into English — and he is used here for the documentary content of the Bazin footnote and the sequence of the night, not for his verdicts.

Details of the assassination vary between accounts and the variations are reported rather than resolved: the date is given as 19 or 20 June 1747 and the place as Fathabad near Quchan in Khorasan; the number entering the royal enclosure is given as four in Malcolm and around fifteen elsewhere; and the principals are named as Mahomed Aly Khan and Salah Beg by Malcolm, and as Mohammad Qoli Khan Qereqlu, captain of the personal guard, and Salah Khan, overseer of the household, in other accounts which also identify both as relatives of Nadir. Bazin's fuller narrative, resting partly on the testimony of the concubine Chuki, is known to this study only through the modern literature and is not quoted. The reported resolution of the officers to breakfast off Nadir before he supped off them is preserved in the tradition and repeated widely; it could not be traced to a primary text in the course of this research and is presented in the text as a report rather than a quotation. Adil Shah's accession decree, naming Mohammad Qoli Khan as *qurchi-bashi* and describing the commission to the Afshar guards, is quoted elsewhere in this study from Jonas Hanway's *An Historical Account of the British Trade over the Caspian Sea* (London, 1753), vol. II, and is the incoming regime's justification for a coup.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited: the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* article on Nader Shah (Ernest Tucker) for the cabal of Afshar and Qajar officers, the revolt of Ali Qoli two months before the assassination and his accession as Adil Shah, and the fate of Nadir's line; the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* article on the army of the Afshar and Zand periods for the deliberate ethnic diversification of the army to promote competition and reduce the risk of concerted disaffection; Michael Axworthy's *The Sword of Persia* and "The Army of Nader Shah" (*Iranian Studies* 40:5, 2007) for the army's composition, the position of Ahmad Khan Abdali as commander of the Afghan contingent, and the Bakhtiari campaign; Ann Lambton's *Landlord and Peasant in Persia* for the substitution of salaries for land tenure; John Perry for the resettlement policy and for Karim Khan Zand's origins as a Lak deported to Khorasan; and the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* article on Erekle II for the Georgian grants of 1744. The tradition that Ahmad Khan Abdali reached the tent, found the body and the severed head, wept, and departed for Kandahar is preserved in Afghan sources and is reported here as such.

No quotation, date, attribution or figure has been reconstructed from memory; where accounts conflict, both are given, and where a phrase could not be traced to a primary source that is said. The plurality question, the disintegration of 1747–50, and the grim accounting are treated in the modules built to carry them.

ONE OF THE SHAH'S ROYAL SEALS

Module 9 · Plurality or Foreclosure — what protection anyone actually had from the apparatus, where it came from, and why the largest package of liberties in Iran evaporated inside a decade while the narrowest one outlived the man who granted it

What is being looked for

There is a state apparatus. The question is whether anybody had protection from it.

Not sentiment about it, and not what its documents claimed. The concrete things: could you be taxed at a rate you had not agreed and could not contest? Could you petition, and did the petition reach anyone, and did the answer bind anybody? Could you assemble? Could you go to a court the ruler did not own? If an official robbed you, was there anywhere to go?

And the second question, which is the one that explains the first. Protections of this kind are not created by the man at the bottom. He has neither the standing to demand them nor the means to enforce them. They are won by **factions inside the hierarchy** who have both — a class that the apex needs, bargaining from strength at a moment when neither side wants to destroy the arrangement, so that a concession is cheaper than a fight. The privilege is granted to buy off a particular group in a particular quarrel; and then, if it lodges somewhere durable, it stays after the quarrel is forgotten, and the next generation inherits it as a thing that simply exists. That accreted deposit — **residue** — is what liberty in a pre-modern order actually consists of, and where somebody below the nobility is ever let inside, there is usually a factional fight upstream that explains it.

Eleven years is not long to accrete anything. But Nadir did not rule a blank country. He ruled one with two centuries of residue already in it, and the useful question is therefore not only what he built but what he found, and what he did to it.

What existed in 1722

The Safavid order had produced, over two hundred years, a set of genuine counterweights. Not liberties in any modern sense, and not held by everybody — but real, specific and enforceable protections held by identifiable classes, and each of them traceable to somebody's bargaining position.

The ulama held the largest. Their independence rested on *waqf* — endowed property which, in law, no ruler could resume. That is the hardest form of protection there is, because it does not depend on anybody's continuing goodwill: it funded the madrasas, the courts, the *shaykh al-Islam* of each city, and by the end an office at the head of the whole establishment. A class with its own revenue can afford to say things.

The Armenians of New Julfa held the most extensive package in the country, and it is the clearest instance in Iranian history of the mechanism this module is looking for. Shah Abbas I resettled them at Isfahan in 1604–5 because he needed the silk trade run, and they were the people who could run it; and what they extracted for it was remarkable. They elected their own mayor, the *kalantar*. They ran their own courts. They rang church bells and held public religious processions. They faced no restrictions on dress or on the production of wine. No Muslim could reside in the quarter. The *kalantar* had jurisdiction over some two dozen Armenian villages around the capital. And — the detail that names this module — **the mayor was given one of the shah's own royal seals**, so that he could bypass the bureaucracy and act with the sovereign's authority in his hand.

Foreign merchants held capitulations, farmans granting the English and Dutch companies customs privileges and the right to trade, bargained for in the same way and for the same reason.

And there was the *bast* — sanctuary at shrines and certain other places, a customary immunity nobody had legislated and every ruler had found it easier to respect than to abolish.

The 1683 test

Whether a protection is real is settled not by its wording but by what happens when it is tested against the state. The New Julfa package was tested, and it held, and the episode is worth setting out because it is the mechanism working exactly as the framework describes.

In 1683 the *darugha* — the prefect — of Isfahan was a man named Aslamas Beg, hostile to Armenians, who issued a ban forbidding non-Muslims to leave their houses or appear in public when it was raining, on the doctrine that they would otherwise pollute believers by contact with water running off them. It is a small, spiteful, entirely typical piece of administrative harassment.

The wealthy Armenian merchants of New Julfa **appealed over his head to the queen mother, and the ban was cancelled.**

Look at what that requires and what it does not. It does not require a court, a charter, a right of appeal or any doctrine of religious freedom. It requires a faction with

means, a patron inside the hierarchy with access to the apex, and — decisively — a shah who wanted the silk revenue more than he wanted his prefect's satisfaction. That is bargaining from a position of strength, and it produced a concrete result: an edict of the state reversed on the petition of a subject population.

That is what protection looked like in Safavid Iran, and it was worth having. It was also, as the next fifty years would demonstrate, held on precisely one condition.

What Nadir did to each of them

Now run the same list forward.

The ulama. He killed the *mullabashi* in February 1736. He ordered a cadastral survey, confiscated the *waqf* estates, incorporated them into the *raqabat-e Naderi* under the fiscal department, and suspended the Safavid framework of pious foundations — the revenues that were, in the plain statement of the scholarship, the main source of financial support for the important ulama. And the effect on their standing as a counterweight was immediate and total, because their independence had never been a doctrine; it had been an income. A jurist with an endowed chair can decline to rule as the shah wishes. A jurist whose endowment is now a line in the *divan* register cannot.

This is where the corpus's earlier finding has to be tested, because it predicted otherwise. The Inca study identified two conditions for a faction to resist an apex: **seizable assets and the capacity to combine**. The Shi'i ulama of 1736 had both — enormous endowed property, and a doctrinally unified class spread across every city in Iran with a shared training and a shared law. They lost anyway, comprehensively, in about a year.

The finding does not break, but it needs a third term. Their assets were seizable in the sense that mattered to *them* — worth defending — but they were also seizable in the sense that mattered to *him*: static, registered, immovable, and located in towns his army could reach. And their capacity to combine was **doctrinal, not military**. They could agree; they could not muster. Under the Safavids that had been sufficient, because their combination operated through an apex who needed their endorsement. Under a ruler who had decided he did not need it, agreement without force was simply an opinion. So the specification is this: **the capacity to combine only counts where combination has a lever to pull.** A class that can coordinate its speech is powerful in an order that runs on legitimacy and powerless in one that runs on cash and cavalry — and the ulama's catastrophe was that the order changed under them without their assets becoming any less seizable.

New Julfa. The community was pressed for taxes it could not meet, and when it failed to produce them Nadir let his soldiers plunder the suburb. The Julfan network had been mono-centred on that quarter, and the centre did not hold; the trading system that had reached from Amsterdam to Manila came apart, and the surviving families dispersed to the Mediterranean, to Russia and to South Asia. The Lazarian family went to Russia, where a son became court banker to Catherine the Great. New Julfa itself was pillaged repeatedly in the anarchy after 1747, and the Julfan merchants of Basra, invited home in 1771 with promises of security, protection and civil freedom, refused to come.

Every liberty in that package — the mayor, the courts, the bells, the processions, the seal — had been conferred by Safavid *farman*. Not one of them was held on any warrant except the shah's. So when a shah appeared who did not want the silk revenue more than he wanted the money in the merchants' houses, there was nothing there. The most extensive set of protections enjoyed by any community in Iran was extinguished not by being revoked but by being *ignored*, which is what happens to a grant when the granter's successor declines to renew it and no other authority stands behind it.

The bast and the shrines. The record this study has been able to consult does not establish what became of sanctuary under Nadir, and the honest thing is to say so rather than assume. What it does establish is the direction of travel: the shrine of the Eighth Imam at Mashhad had its bullion reserves stripped twice in a decade before he took the throne, once by a Safavid commander and once by Malek Mahmud Sistani to strike coin in his own name; Nadir endowed it in 1732 and then suspended the endowment framework in 1736. An institution whose treasury is a war chest is not in a position to shelter anybody from the man who commands the army.

And the foreigners. The English and Dutch companies are the one group in the empire that retained real leverage, and the reason is instructive: they could **leave**. Nadir wanted their ships, their customs revenue and their transport, and he offered the English reduced customs rates and sought their help in building a fleet. Mobility is a counter-lever, and it was the only one anybody had. But even it was thin. In May 1736 his admiral simply seized the East Indiaman *Northumberland* at Bushehr and used her to take Bahrain. When he needed the ship, the capitulation was worth nothing either.

So the inventory returns almost nothing. Violence, wealth and the interpretation of the law were held in one hand, absolutely, and the framework's own definition of foreclosure — all three monopolies captured by the same coalition, with no counterweight the apex does not own — is satisfied more completely here than in any case this corpus has run.

The one petition that survives

Except in one place, and it deserves careful reading because it is the only documentary instance of a subject obtaining a protection from Nadir that survives to be examined.

In December 1742 or January 1743, at the height of the extraction crisis, Armenian merchants of Agulis in Nakhchivan — Hovhannes and Martiros — petitioned the shah about the taxes being demanded of them and the abuses and extortions of his officials. He answered with a *farman*, and it survives in the Catholicosate archive of the Matenadaran. Its content, as published by the scholars who found it, is precise and modest: taxes on these merchants are to be levied **only once per transit** through Iranian territory, and officials are **forbidden to demand goods or payments for items the merchants do not have in their possession**.

Everything about that document is worth holding. A subject population petitioned an absolute ruler about the conduct of his own officials, in the middle of the worst fiscal squeeze of the reign, and received a written instrument in its favour. The channel existed and it worked. And the concessions are real: a merchant taxed once instead of at every post has been given something worth having, and a prohibition on charging him for goods he is not carrying is a response to a specific and recognisable racket.

And then the detail that tells you what kind of thing it is. The decree, in the assessment of its editors, **reiterated the stipulations of several previous decrees obtained by Julfan merchants** — it was a reissue of protections that had been granted before and had stopped working.

That is the test of whether a liberty is more than words on paper, and the Agulis farman fails it in the most informative way. A right does not need to be re-bought. A protection that has to be purchased again every few years, by a fresh petition from fresh petitioners, is not a protection but a **licence** — revocable by silence, enforceable only by the goodwill of the man who signed it, and worth exactly what he currently thinks the petitioners are worth to him. The merchants of Agulis had a channel and no lever. They could ask, and he could answer, and his officials could go on doing as they liked until the next petition.

Set that beside New Julfa in 1683 and the difference is visible. In 1683 the Armenians did not petition for a favour; they went over an official's head to a patron at court and got a state edict reversed, because the shah's interest ran with theirs. In 1743 the merchants of Agulis petitioned the apex directly, obtained a document, and were back where they started — because Nadir's interest ran against theirs and there was no third party whose interest ran with them.

The concession that outlived him

And now the exception, which is the module's real finding, because it is the one thing granted in this reign that left residue.

In 1744, as a reward for their loyalty and specifically for putting down an anti-Persian revolt in Georgia the year before, Nadir granted the kingship of Kartli to Teimuraz and the kingship of Kakheti to his son Erekle, and married his own nephew to Teimuraz's daughter. On 1 October 1745 both men were crowned at Svetitskhoveli in Mtskheta **by Christian rite** — the first Christian coronation of Georgian kings since 1632.

Every element of the user's mechanism is present. A faction inside the hierarchy with standing and means — two Bagratid princes with armed followings and a demonstrated capacity to deliver a province. A moment when the apex needed them and neither side wanted a fight. A concession granted to buy loyalty in a particular quarrel. And a privilege that would not otherwise have been available: a Muslim sovereign permitting his Christian vassals to be crowned in a cathedral by their own church.

And unlike everything else in this module, it *stayed*. Within two years the two kings had withdrawn their loyalty; Nadir sent thirty thousand troops against them; and on his death they expelled every Persian garrison in Georgia, including from Tbilisi. Erekle succeeded his father in 1762, unified eastern Georgia for the first time in three centuries, and ruled until 1798.

Why did this one survive when the far larger New Julfa package did not? The answer is the one this study has been assembling since the landscape, now applied to liberty. **The Georgian crowns were not lodged in Nadir's goodwill. They were lodged in an institution with a warrant of its own** — the Bagratid kingship, a thousand years old, confirmed by the Georgian church in its own cathedral by its own rite. What Nadir gave was not the title. It was the *removal of an obstacle* to a title that already existed and that he had not invented and could not un-invent. So when he stopped wanting it to be true, it went on being true.

The New Julfa privileges, by contrast, were lodged nowhere but in a *farman*. The mayor's authority was one of the shah's seals — the shah's, held in an Armenian hand, exactly as a subordinate seven hundred miles from Ismail's court had once carried Ismail's seal on a chain around his neck. The instrument is portable and the warrant is not. Hand a man the seal and he can act until the day the seal stops meaning anything, and then he is a man holding a piece of metal.

Reading plurality against the framework

Four things, and the first is the module's contribution.

Residue accretes only where a concession is lodged in an institution whose warrant is independent of the conceder. The card's question is capture versus contestability across the three monopolies, and it treats plurality as a structural condition of an order. This case suggests adding a question about the *history* of each protection, because two protections identical on paper behave completely differently over time depending on where they are lodged. A concession lodged in the ruler's goodwill — a farman, a privilege, a personal exemption — provides real protection while the relationship holds and leaves **no residue whatever**, because there is nothing for it to accrete into; when the relationship ends the protection does not have to be revoked, it simply stops being renewed. A concession lodged in a body with its own standing — a church, an endowed college, a lineage, a chartered corporation, a court with its own revenue — outlives the quarrel that produced it and becomes the deposit the next generation inherits as furniture. **The diagnostic is a single question: if the granter died tonight, who would enforce this?** Where the answer is "nobody," the protection is a licence, whatever it is called on the parchment; and a licence, however generous, contributes nothing to the accumulated stock of liberty, which is why the largest package in Iran left less behind it than the narrowest.

Second, liberty runs on endowment, and this is the same instrument again. This study has now traced four consequences to one missing capacity, and here is the fifth. A protection needs an institution behind it; an institution needs an independent income; and an independent income means property alienated permanently to a body beyond the ruler's power of recall — which is the same act as making a settlement and the same act as funding a formation. The ulama did not lose their independence because they were out-argued or out-voted. They lost it because their endowments were converted into a revenue line, and a class without its own money is a class without its own opinions. **A ruler who cannot make owners cannot make believers, and cannot be checked either.** The three are one capacity seen from three angles, and its absence forecloses all three at once.

Third, a specification of the corpus's finding on seizable assets and the capacity to combine. The Shi'i ulama had both and lost, which looks like a refutation and is in fact a sharpening. Their capacity to combine was **doctrinal rather than military** — they could agree in every city of Iran and could not put a squadron in the field — and that had been sufficient under a dynasty whose legitimacy required their endorsement, and was worthless under a ruler who had decided he did not need it. So the corpus should add that **the capacity to combine only counts where combination has a**

lever to pull, and that a class whose lever is legitimacy is in mortal danger from precisely the moment an apex concludes he can do without it. The ulama's assets did not become more seizable in 1736. Their agreement became less valuable, and the assets followed.

Fourth, on rhetoric and what came after. The framework insists on distinguishing a protection from a form of words, and one honest observation belongs here. The strongest man in Iran for a generation after Nadir — Karim Khan Zand, who had served in Nadir's army — declined the title of shah, called himself *vakil*, deputy, and reinterpreted it as *vakil al-ra'aya*, deputy of the subjects: the name of a minor local office whose function was investigating complaints of administrative abuse. The scholarship reads that partly as a reflection of what the political nation had come to expect after Nadir, and this study will record it as such and refuse to inflate it. It is not a protection. Nobody could compel Karim Khan to hear a complaint, and the office he named himself after had no power over him whatever. What it is, precisely, is evidence that after eleven years of an apparatus nobody had any defence against, a ruler found it worth his while to describe himself as the subjects' representative rather than their king. That is a change in what had to be *said*, which is the thinnest possible residue and is not nothing — the words were available for someone later to hold a ruler to — but it is words, and this module's whole purpose is to keep the distinction.

A closing refusal. It would be easy to conclude from all this that Iran had no tradition of liberty and that Nadir merely confirmed a condition. That is wrong on the evidence and the evidence is in this module. Iran in 1722 had communal self-government with its own courts, an interpreter class with inalienable endowments, customary sanctuary, capitulations, and a functioning practice of petition that had reversed a state edict within living memory. Those were real, they had been won by identifiable factions bargaining from strength, and they were the accumulated residue of two centuries of ordinary quarrels inside the hierarchy. What this reign demonstrates is not that such things never existed but **how quickly they can be removed when every one of them is lodged in the same place** — and that place was the person of the shah. A country whose liberties are all grants from one office loses them all at once, on the day somebody occupies that office who has no use for them. The Georgians kept theirs because theirs were kept somewhere else.

A note on sources

The New Julfa privileges under the Safavids — the elected *kalantar*, the community's own courts, church bells and public processions, the absence of restrictions on dress and wine, the exclusion of Muslim residence, the *kalantar*'s

jurisdiction over the surrounding Armenian villages, and the grant to him of one of the shah's royal seals to bypass the bureaucracy — follow the standard accounts of the community's charter, including the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* articles on Julfa in the Safavid period and in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and Sebouh Aslanian's *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa*. The episode of 1683, in which the *darugha* of Isfahan Aslamas Beg banned non-Muslims from appearing in public in the rain and the ban was cancelled after the Julfan merchants appealed to the queen mother Nakihat Khanum, is reported from Willem Floor's *Safavid Government Institutions*. The collapse of the community under Nadir — the exorbitant levies, the plundering of the suburb when the sums could not be raised, the consequent unravelling of the Julfan network and the dispersal of the surviving families to the Mediterranean, Russia and South Asia — follows Aslanian and the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* article on Julfa in the eighteenth century, which is also the source for the repeated pillaging of the quarter in the anarchy after 1747 and for the refusal of the Julfan merchants of Basra in 1771 to return on promises of security, protection and civil freedom.

The decree to the merchants of Agulis (Matenadaran, folder 1g, doc. 1288, December 1742 – January 1743) is described from the publication and analysis by Kristine Kostikyan and Gor Margaryan, who established the document and its context: the petition of the merchants Hovhannes and Martiros; the stipulation that taxes be levied only once per transit through Iranian regions; the prohibition on officials demanding goods or payments for items not in the merchants' possession; and the finding that the decree reiterated stipulations of several earlier decrees obtained by Julfan merchants. The document is not quoted here, since it reaches this study only through a modern edition and translation, and the reading offered of what its status as a reissue implies is this study's own.

The confiscation of the *waqf* estates, the cadastral survey and the *raqabat-e Naderi*, the suspension of the framework of pious foundations, and the killing of the *mullabashi* Mirza Abu'l-Hasan follow Ann Lambton's *Landlord and Peasant in Persia* and Ernest Tucker's *Encyclopaedia Iranica* article on Nader Shah, as set out at greater length elsewhere in this study. The Georgian material — the grant of Kartli to Teimuraz and Kakheti to Erekle in 1744, the marriage of Nadir's nephew Ali Qoli to Teimuraz's daughter Ketevan, the coronation of both kings by Christian rite at Svetitskhoveli in Mtskheta on 1 October 1745 as the first such since 1632, the dispatch of thirty thousand troops against them, the expulsion of the Persian garrisons after 1747, and Erekle's unification of eastern Georgia — follows the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* article on Erekle II and the standard Georgian sources. The naval material, including

the seizure of the East Indiaman *Northumberland* at Bushehr in May 1736 and the reduced customs offered to the English, follows Willem Floor and the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* article on Nader Shah and the Iranian navy. Karim Khan Zand's adoption and reinterpretation of the title *vakil al-ra'aya*, and the reading of it as reflecting expectations of the period, follow John Perry's work as summarised in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* articles on the Zand dynasty and on Karim Khan.

Where the record does not establish something, this module says so rather than supplying it: what became of the customary right of sanctuary under Nadir could not be determined from the sources consulted, and no claim is made about it. Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited throughout, not quoted at length. No quotation, date, attribution or figure has been reconstructed from memory. The collapse of 1747 and its aftermath, and the accounting of what the reign cost, are treated in the modules built to carry them.

TIME WILL DISCOVER

Module 10 · Change and Collapse — the risings that lost, the fifteen men who did not, and an empire that did not change hands but stopped existing

The risings that lost

The claim to be tested is that structural change never comes from below, because a functioning floor of force does not lose to its own population, and that when an order does change it is because the floor cracked — through fracture, exhaustion, conquest, or the overbreeding of the elite.

Afsharid Iran is close to a laboratory for that claim, because it supplies both halves of the experiment inside four years, under the same apparatus, against the same ruler.

The first half is the risings. By the middle 1740s Iran was in a condition of popular revolt as general as anything in its history. The taxes had been reimposed and driven upward, arrears were being recovered from groups that had been granted exemption, whole villages had gone into the mountains, and the roads out of the country had been put under passport control precisely because so many people were using them. Grievance was not in short supply. Neither was rebellion. There were risings in Fars under Mohammad Taqi Khan Shirazi from January 1744, among the Bakhtiari under Ali Morad, in Astarabad, in Shirvan, among the Kurds, in Khwarazm, in Sistan, and around a succession of Safavid pretenders.

Every one of them was crushed.

Not narrowly, and not after long campaigns. Nadir sacked Shiraz in June 1744 and had the whole set broken by that winter. Ali Morad was hunted into a cave, blinded, mutilated and killed, three thousand of his families were seized and thousands deported. Taqi Khan was taken and mutilated, his brother and sons executed in front of him. The towers of heads went up across the provinces. And the shah then went straight back to the Ottoman war and won a battle at Baghavard in August 1745.

This is the framework's near-law operating without complication. A population in maximum distress, in open revolt across half a dozen provinces simultaneously, against an apparatus that had not divided — and the apparatus won every time, because unorganised bodies lose to organised violence and numbers are not force. The anger was the constant. It did nothing.

The second half of the experiment is what happened when the constant met a variable. On the night of 19–20 June 1747, in a camp at Fathabad near Quchan, roughly fifteen men killed him, and the empire ended.

Which crack

Of the four ways a floor cracks, this case runs two, and the relation between them is the finding.

It is not **conquest**. No rival elite defeated Nadir; the Ottomans had just made peace on terms he largely dictated, the Russians had withdrawn by treaty a decade earlier, and no foreign army crossed the frontier in 1747 or 1748 to push anything over.

It is not **overproduction**. The framework's engine — an order breeding more claimants than it has chairs, until the thwarted near-elite turns revolutionary and leads the crowd as fuel — requires chairs to be scarce. Here, as this study has established, there were no chairs at all. Nobody held a heritable office, a landed estate, an endowment or a title that survived the ruler's displeasure, so no class of disappointed claimants accumulated, because there was no ladder to be blocked on. The condition was the inverse: under-production of positions.

It is **fracture**, and it is **exhaustion**, and the exhaustion produced the fracture.

A floor that exhausted itself by winning

The exhaustion needs stating carefully, because it does not take the standard form and the difference is a contribution.

The classic mechanism — the one that runs beneath the great revolutions — is a state broken by fiscal-military competition with rivals abroad: a war lost, a treasury bankrupted by the effort of keeping up, an army destroyed in the field, and a regime that has visibly failed at the one thing a state exists to do. Defeat is the usual solvent.

Nadir was not defeated. He beat the Ghilzai, the Abdali, the Ottomans repeatedly, the Mughals in an afternoon, the Uzbeks of Bukhara and Khiva; he took Bahrain; he brought the Russians to terms without fighting them. The single failure of his reign was Daghestan, where he lost heavily to attrition and never subdued the Avars — a real reverse and one that cost him a great deal, but not a defeat that destroyed his instrument or opened his country to anybody.

The exhaustion came from the **maintenance cost of an undefeated army**. On the only contemporary estimate available, the wage bill alone ran at something on the order of two to four times the entire annual revenue of the Safavid state at its wealthiest, levied on a far poorer country. That obligation did not arise from losing. It arose from

the size of the instrument that kept winning — an army that grew by absorbing the men it defeated, so that every victory enlarged the payroll and raised the sum that the next victory would have to produce. India covered it once, spectacularly. Nothing after India covered it at all, because there was nothing left within reach worth taking on that scale.

So the crack in the floor was opened, on the fiscal side, by success. **A floor can exhaust itself by winning**, where the instrument's running cost exceeds what the territory it holds can generate — and in that configuration the exhaustion is not an accident of a bad war but a property of the arrangement, arriving on a schedule set by the supply of plunderable neighbours.

The night, and what did not happen next

The fracture itself was reconstructed in the audit of the hierarchy, and the essentials are these: Nadir told the chief of the Afghans that he relied entirely on the fidelity of his corps and that in the morning they were to seize and imprison all the officers of his guard; the intention leaked; and the officers, learning that their names were on a proscription list, struck first. The captain of the guard and a chief of Nadir's own Afshar tribe walked past the sentries on the strength of their stations, and he was killed in his tent.

What matters for this module is what happened in the following hours, and it is a **negative** finding of unusual clarity.

Nothing was seized. No faction took the apparatus. No party opened a door and handed a crowd through it. There was no programme, no proclamation of a cause, no counter-elite waiting with an alternative arrangement, and no crowd anywhere near the camp. The conspirators had no plan beyond not being arrested at dawn, and the accounts note that their attempt to conceal what they had done failed almost immediately. Nadir's nephew Ali Qoli, who had risen in revolt two months earlier and was probably in the plot, took the throne in July as Adil Shah and immediately did the only thing his position permitted: he had every one of Nadir's sons and grandsons killed at Kalat, except the thirteen-year-old Shahrokh, whose mother had been a Safavid.

And the favoured contingent, whose fidelity Nadir had declared he reposed upon entirely, did not fight for the arrangement either. Ahmad Khan Abdali reached the royal tent, found the body and the severed head, and rode east with the Afghan troops and a portion of the treasure. By October he had been chosen by an assembly of Pashtun chiefs near Kandahar and was founding the state that became Afghanistan.

This is the framework's fracture crack, and it is missing the thing that normally makes fracture productive. In the classic cases one faction of a divided elite arms the common people as a weapon against the other, and the popular energy — entirely real — is recruited, mounted and led, and goes where that faction points it. Here nobody armed anybody, because there was no faction in the sense the mechanism requires. A faction is a group of people with a shared position to defend. Module by module this study has established that no such group existed anywhere in the empire: not among the governors, who held revocable commissions and personal liabilities; not among the officers, who held salaries; not among the tribal khans, who had been broken and deported; not among the ulama, who had been expropriated; not in the family, which the apex had destroyed himself. What killed Nadir was not a faction but **fifteen individuals with a common problem and no common interest**, and the moment the problem was solved they had nothing further to coordinate about.

Ninety days, and then three years

The disintegration therefore took the form not of a contest for the apparatus but of the apparatus ceasing to exist, and the speed is the measure of how little had been built.

Within months: the Afghan contingent gone east with part of the treasury; Kandahar independent and a new dynasty proclaimed by October 1747; Georgia's Persian garrisons expelled, including from Tbilisi, by Teimuraz and Erekle, whose crowns Nadir himself had granted; the Caucasus fragmenting into khanates — Karabakh, Shirvan, Ganja, Sheki, Baku, Quba, Erivan, Nakhchivan, Derbent and more, on some counts around twenty separate polities where there had been provinces; Bukhara and Khiva out; Bahrain, Oman and the Gulf fleet gone, with the ships dispersed and the Arab crews long since mutinous.

Within three years: Adil Shah overthrown in 1748 by his own brother Ebrahim, who was in turn defeated and executed; Nadir's blinded grandson Shahrokh installed in Khorasan as a client of Ahmad Shah Durrani; Shahrokh deposed in December 1749 in favour of the *mutawalli* of the Imam Reza shrine, proclaimed Suleiman II on the strength of a Safavid grandmother; Suleiman blinded some forty days later and Shahrokh restored, also blind; and on 29 June 1750 Karim Khan Zand, Ali Mardan Khan Bakhtiari and Abu'l-Fath Khan installing a seventeen-year-old Safavid at Isfahan as Ismail III.

From Bahrain to Bukhara, from the Caucasus to the Indus, in thirty-six months, with no foreign army involved at any point.

The deportees who walked home

One detail measures the whole thing better than the map does.

Nadir's most systematic domestic policy had been the forced movement of populations — Bakhtiari families to Khorasan after Ali Morad's revolt, Kurds moved, and the tribes of Karabakh, the Javanshir and Otuz-Iki and Kabirli, deported east to break the Caucasian houses that had opposed his elevation at Mughan. It was the closest thing in the reign to a permanent alteration of the country, and it had been enforced by the most formidable army in Asia.

After 1747 they walked back. Panah Ali Beg Javanshir, whose brother Nadir had executed and who had escaped Khorasan by pretext and hidden in the Karabakh mountains, declared himself khan; the deported tribes returned to their old camps and joined him; and an Azerbaijani chronicler's phrase for what followed is that everyone who reached his former camp began to live quietly. Karim Khan Zand, a Lak whom Nadir had deported from the Zagros to serve in the army, did the same thing at the head of his own people.

Nothing had to be dismantled. The relocations reversed themselves the moment the force stopped, because no one anywhere had an interest in their persisting. That is what a policy with no settlement behind it looks like from the far side: not a legacy that decays, but an arrangement that was only ever the shape of an army's shadow.

What replaced it

And what filled the space is this study's argument closing on itself.

Every serious contender for Iran between 1747 and 1751 reached for the same currency. Adil Shah spared one boy out of Nadir's whole line because that boy's mother had been a Safavid. The men who deposed Shahrokh reached for a shrine administrator with a Safavid grandmother. The men who deposed *him* restored Shahrokh, because his Safavid blood ran through the other side. And Karim Khan Zand, who had served in Nadir's army and watched the entire experiment from inside the tent, took Isfahan, installed a Safavid puppet, and then ruled Iran for something close to three decades **without ever taking the title of shah** — calling himself *vakil*, deputy, and reinterpreting the word as *vakil al-ra'aya*, deputy of the subjects. When Ismail III died in comfortable confinement at Abada in 1773, the fiction was quietly dropped.

Twenty-six years after the Ja'fari *madhhab* was decreed at Mughan and the head of the Shi'i establishment was strangled for observing that everyone was for the Safavid dynasty, the strongest man in Iran was still governing in a dead dynasty's name. The

two-century conquest outlasted the eleven-year one by every measure that could be applied.

Reading change against the framework

The framework's account of change survives this case intact and gains two specifications, one of which is substantial.

First, the confirmation, and it is unusually clean. Iran in the middle 1740s ran the control and the treatment inside four years. Mass popular revolt against an undivided apparatus, in half a dozen provinces at once, with grievance at a level rarely equalled — crushed, comprehensively, at every point, with the leaders mutilated and their people deported. Then fifteen men from inside the apex, and the order was gone in a night. The anger below was not merely insufficient; it was causally inert with respect to the change that came, and the men who made the change were not acting on it and did not represent it. Nadir did not fall because the country could not bear him. He fell because his own guard officers read a proscription list.

Second, the substantial addition: fracture without a settlement produces dissolution rather than revolution. The card's account of the first crack is that the elite splits and one faction arms the people against the other, so that the crowd is handed through a door opened from inside. That account presupposes something the card does not currently state: **that there is a faction there to open the door.** A faction is not merely a group of allies; it is a group with a *shared position to defend*, which is what gives it a programme, a reason to recruit, and something to install once it wins. Where a settlement exists, the men who fracture the apex hold estates, offices, endowments or charters, and their quarrel is over the terms on which those holdings continue — so the fracture produces a contest for the apparatus, and the apparatus is captured and changes hands, and something recognisable comes out the other end.

Where no settlement exists, the fracture is between *individuals* whose only shared characteristic is proximity to the ruler, and it produces no contest at all, because there is nothing to contest. The apparatus does not transfer; it evaporates, because it never consisted of anything except the ruler's own reach. So the corpus should carry the pairing: **the same crack produces a revolution in a settled order and a dissolution in an unsettled one**, and the diagnostic is whether the men who fracture the apex are defending holdings or merely saving their lives. Nadir's killers were saving their lives. They had nothing to install because they had never had anything to hold, and the empire accordingly did not fall to anyone — it simply stopped, and every district reverted to whoever was locally strongest, which is the condition the country had been in before he started.

Third, a specification of the exhaustion crack. The card derives exhaustion from great-power war shattering a floor from outside, most often through defeat. This case shows the same crack opened by an army that was never beaten, because the running cost of the instrument exceeded what the territory could yield. Where an order's coercive apparatus grows by absorbing the defeated, its payroll expands with every victory, and its solvency therefore depends not on winning but on the *continued availability of plunderable neighbours* — a finite resource that the order consumes fastest when it is doing best. **A floor in that configuration exhausts itself by winning**, and its crisis arrives not after a defeat but after the last worthwhile conquest, which in this case is dated precisely: Delhi, March 1739. Everything from 1741 onward is a state trying to pay from an impoverished country a bill that only India had ever covered.

And the compounding, which is where this study ends its analytical arc. This module is the fifth appearance of a single fact. He could not bind his elite, could not install a belief, could not tune his extraction, could not be checked by anybody, and could not be succeeded — and every one of those is a consequence of holding nothing conveyable, which is a consequence of holding no warrant. The framework should record that in an apex without a warrant these are not five variables that failed together. They are one variable observed five times.

A closing that belongs to the family. In 1742, some days after Nadir had his eldest son blinded on the word of a would-be assassin, he had the young man brought before him and asked, with what Hanway calls a mixture of paternal tenderness, after his health. Reza Qoli's reported answer is the best summary of this module that anyone produced at the time, and it was delivered five years before the event it describes:

> *"You have not blinded me so much as you have blinded all Persia: what the consequence must be, time will discover."*

The consequence, when time discovered it, was not a revolution and not a conquest. It was that an empire reaching from Bahrain to Bukhara turned out to have been one man, and when the man stopped, so did it.

A note on sources

The quotation from Reza Qoli is from Jonas Hanway, *An Historical Account of the British Trade over the Caspian Sea* (London, 1753), vol. II, as that public-domain edition prints it; it is a contemporary's report of speech rather than a document, reaching Hanway at second hand from British Company servants in Persia, and is

presented as such. Hanway is also the source, elsewhere in this study, for Adil Shah's accession decree and for the tax measures of the successor regime.

The events of the assassination follow the sources set out in the module on elite coordination, principally Sir John Malcolm's *History of Persia* (1815), vol. II, reproducing the testimony of Père Louis Bazin, Nadir's physician, from the *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*; the date is given variously as 19 or 20 June 1747 and the place as Fathabad near Quchan in Khorasan, and the number of conspirators entering the enclosure as four in Malcolm and around fifteen elsewhere. The *Encyclopaedia Iranica* article on Nader Shah (Ernest Tucker) is the authority for the cabal of Afshar and Qajar officers, the revolt of Ali Qoli two months earlier and his accession as Adil Shah, the killing of Nadir's sons and grandsons except Shahrokh, and the subsequent five-year civil war; and for the revolts of 1744–46, the rising of Mohammad Taqi Khan Shirazi from January 1744, the sack of Shiraz in June 1744, and the victory at Baghavard in August 1745. Michael Axworthy's *The Sword of Persia* is the further authority for the Bakhtiari campaign against Ali Morad and the deportations that followed.

The disintegration is reconstructed from the standard accounts: Ahmad Khan Abdali's departure with the Afghan contingent and part of the treasure, his selection near Kandahar in October 1747 and the founding of the Durrani state; the expulsion of the Persian garrisons from Georgia by Teimuraz II and Erekle II, whose kingships Nadir had granted in 1744 (*Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. Erekle II); the emergence of the Caucasian and Azerbaijani khanates after 1747, including Karabakh under Panah Ali Khan Javanshir, together with Shirvan, Ganja, Sheki, Baku, Quba, Erivan, Nakhchivan and Derbent, on which the Azerbaijani historiographical tradition (Mirza Adigozal Beg, *Karabakhnameh*; Mirza Jamal Javanshir, *History of Karabakh*) and the modern surveys are the sources — and where that tradition's framing is nationally inflected, the point used here is confined to the documented return of the deported Javanshir, Otuz-Iki and Kabirli tribes to Karabakh, which is attested in those chronicles and reported here as their testimony. The succession sequence — Adil Shah's overthrow by his brother Ebrahim in 1748, Shahrokh's installation in Khorasan as a client of Ahmad Shah Durrani, his deposition in December 1749 in favour of Mir Sayyed Mohammad as Suleiman II on the strength of his Safavid descent, Suleiman's blinding after some forty days and Shahrokh's restoration, and the installation of Abu Torab as Ismail III at Isfahan on 29 June 1750 by Karim Khan Zand, Ali Mardan Khan Bakhtiari and Abu'l-Fath Khan — follows John Perry's "The Last Safavids, 1722–1773" (*Iran* 9, 1971) and his *Karim Khan Zand* (1979), as summarised in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* articles on the Zand dynasty and Karim Khan, which are also the authority for Karim Khan's

lifelong refusal of the title of shah, his adoption and reinterpretation of *vakil al-ra'aya*, and Ismail III's death at Abada in 1773.

The fiscal comparison underlying the account of exhaustion is set out with its full caveats in the module on extraction and is not repeated here; it rests on Hanway's contemporary estimate of the army's wage bill and on seventeenth-century European estimates of Safavid revenue, and is an order-of-magnitude statement rather than a calculation. Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited, not quoted at length. No quotation, date, attribution or figure has been reconstructed from memory; where accounts conflict, both are given. The demographic and material accounting of what the reign cost, and the comparative reading, are treated in the modules built to carry them.

NOT OF MONEY ONLY

Module 11 · The Grim Accounting — what the arrangement cost in the sword and in the metabolic note; why the debt in Iran was called as a permanent step rather than a spike; and the particular shape the forgetting took in an order too short-lived to become furniture

Two ledgers

An armed group took power, held it for eleven years, and stopped. This module totals what that cost, and it keeps two columns.

The first is what the sword did directly: battle, massacre, mutilation, enslavement, the killing incidental to collection. The second is the metabolic note. Advanced agrarian societies lift their populations above the land's natural carrying capacity by coordination — irrigation, storage, transport, the division of labour that lets a valley feed more people than it otherwise could. That lift is borrowed against continued coordination. Break the coordination and the note is called, and it is paid not in battle deaths but in famine, in disease, and in a population settling back toward what the land will carry unassisted.

Whether the second column applies is a question to be tested rather than assumed, and this study should say at the outset that it expected the answer to be "only slightly." Nadir left a great deal running. He was not clearing populations off land, he needed the peasantry alive and working, and he was not conducting the kind of systematic destruction that follows a steppe conquest. The expectation was a heavy sword column and a light metabolic one.

The evidence says otherwise, and the reason it says otherwise is the most useful thing in this module.

The sword: what can be counted

Take first what the record will actually bear, with ranges where it disagrees.

Delhi, 22 March 1739. The largest single-day figure attributable to Nadir personally: between twenty and thirty thousand people killed in the *qatl-i amm* in one day, with higher figures in some accounts and no reliable count, since the bodies were burned or tipped into pits. A Dutch Company representative in the city reported around ten thousand women and children taken as slaves. This followed the killing of somewhere between nine hundred and three thousand of his own soldiers in the rising

of the previous night, and preceded a fine of twenty million rupees on the city, collected by torture, with a documented pattern of suicides among those who could not pay.

Karnal, 24 February 1739. Mughal dead given at roughly ten thousand to twenty or thirty thousand depending on the account, of whom some four hundred were officers.

Daghestan, 1741–43. Genuinely contested. The Dagestani and Russian historiographical tradition records a major Persian defeat at Andalal in September 1741 with losses running into the tens of thousands; the Persian chronicles record no pitched battle there and describe a withdrawal harassed by raiders. What both agree on is that the losses were overwhelmingly to weather, disease and attrition rather than to battle, and that they were very heavy.

The suppression of 1744–46. Here the official history is the witness, and it is testifying against its own subject: Nadir "put to death a great number of his governors and ministers, upon the slightest suspicion of their guilt; and, not satisfied with destroying the leaders of the rebellion, he cut off whole cities, and forced the greatest number of his subjects to seek a refuge in the mountains and deserts." Shiraz was sacked in June 1744. Towers of heads were raised across the provinces, in conscious imitation of Timur.

The blindings. Adil Shah's accession decree of 1747 leads with them — the putting out of the eyes of the inhabitants, the selling of the sons and daughters of Muslims, the extortion that caused multitudes to lose their sight. Hanway, reproducing it, adds that he had heard the number blinded was not less than thirty thousand, "but this seems to be exaggerated." That footnote is the right posture and this study copies it: the figure is a report of a rumour, disowned by the man reporting it, embedded in a document written to justify a coup. What it establishes is not a number but a judgement about what an Iranian audience in 1747 would accept as a fair description of the previous decade.

The sword: what cannot

And now the honest refusal, because the temptation to produce a total is strong and the material will not support one.

There is no census, no burial register, no army return, and no tax roll from which a differential could be computed. Twenty years of campaigning by an army of a hundred thousand and upward, across a theatre running from the Caucasus to the Indus and from the Oxus to the Gulf, generated a mortality among soldiers, camp followers, transport animals and the populations of the districts they moved through that nobody

counted and nobody could now reconstruct. The deportations — thousands of Bakhtiari families to Khorasan, the Karabakh tribes east, the Kurds moved — carried their own attrition, and forced movement of pastoral households across a thousand miles in that period was lethal in ways that leave no record at all.

What can be said is the shape, and the shape is this. The direct killing attributable to Nadir was very large by the standards of his century, was concentrated outside Iran in a single spectacular episode, and was inside Iran a matter of exemplary violence — mutilations, blindings, cities made examples of — rather than of mass extermination. He did not depopulate Iran with the sword. He depopulated it another way, and that is the second column.

Whether the metabolic note applies

Iran is a country where the question has an unusually precise answer, because the mechanism by which it lifted itself above its natural carrying capacity is unusually visible.

Most of the Iranian plateau does not receive enough rain to farm. What made it farmable, over more than two millennia, was the *qanat*: a gently sloping underground channel, sometimes many kilometres long, dug from an aquifer at the foot of the highlands out to the fields, with a line of vertical access shafts along it. A qanat is a capital work of enormous labour, and — this is the part that matters here — it is not a thing you build once. It silts. It collapses. The shafts fall in. It requires continuous maintenance by specialist labour, the *muqanni*, paid for by the cultivators it serves and organised locally by the community that depends on it. A qanat left alone for a few seasons is a qanat that stops delivering water, and a qanat that has fallen in is a major capital project to restore, not a repair.

So Iran's carrying capacity above the natural line was held up by a stock of infrastructure whose maintenance was performed by the resident cultivating population itself.

Which produces a mechanism with an ugly property. **Remove the people and you have destroyed the works without touching them.** A ruler who conscripts the young men, deports whole tribes to the far side of the country, and taxes the remainder until they abandon their villages for the mountains has demolished the irrigation system as effectively as if he had filled in the shafts himself — and has done it through policies that look purely fiscal and military, with no destruction in them at all.

That is exactly what the scholarship on the period identifies. Among the factors named as accentuating the disruption of Iranian economic life through the dynastic upheavals of the eighteenth century, and perpetuating the backwardness that followed,

is the strain placed on the country's irrigation system when the cultivating population of an area was reduced — through forcible conscription, or through flight into other areas. Conscription and flight: the two things this study has documented at length. The passport regime imposed on the road-posts in 1742 exists precisely because the flight was happening on a scale the administration could not tolerate, and Hanway's account of villages retiring into the mountains and of the districts around Isfahan reduced to a dreary waste with the lands untilled is a description of a maintenance workforce walking away from a machine that stops when they do.

So the metabolic note was called, and this study was wrong to expect otherwise.

A step, not a spike

But it was called in a form worth distinguishing, because it is not the one the framework's existing cases display.

The familiar shape is a **spike**: coordination breaks, the harvest fails or cannot be distributed, and there is a mortality event — famine, epidemic — concentrated in months or a few years, after which the survivors rebuild and the population begins to recover toward its former level. The siege of Isfahan in 1722 is a pure instance: bread at fifty shillings a pound in October, the trees felled and their bark sold by weight, corpses in the streets that people grew accustomed to walking over, and somewhere upward of eighty thousand dead in six months, essentially all of them of hunger. That is a spike, and it is dateable to a season.

What Iran suffered across the middle of the eighteenth century is the other shape: a **step**. No single dateable catastrophe; instead the progressive loss of the capital stock on which the elevated carrying capacity rested, so that the land simply supports fewer people from then on. A famine kills and releases; a collapsed qanat does not kill anybody and does not release. It lowers the ceiling.

The consequence is that a step is much harder to see than a spike and much harder to reverse. There is no year to point to. There is no mortality figure. What there is, instead, is a long series of observations by people who noticed that the country was emptier than it should be and could not say when it had happened: European travellers through the following century converging on the impression that Iran's population had declined over the previous centuries and stood below its Safavid level, and describing deserted villages and abandoned agricultural land *including in fertile areas* — which is the diagnostic detail, since land is not abandoned for its own poverty when it is good land.

The signature: a country going back to pasture

A step in carrying capacity has a signature in land use, and Iran shows it plainly. Where irrigated agriculture fails, what replaces it is not empty ground but **pastoralism**, which requires no capital works and can use land that will not support crops.

The eighteenth century is precisely when the balance in Iran shifts back that way. The scholarship on the period names the underrealisation of the country's agricultural potential arising from the survival of pastoral nomadism over large parts of it as one of the standing features of the economy that followed; and John Malcolm's estimate for the early 1800s puts the population at around six million with **half of it nomadic**. The political historiography has its own name for the same phenomenon seen from above — the tribal resurgence and the decline of the bureaucracy in the eighteenth century — and the two descriptions are of one event. A country whose irrigation works have decayed and whose cultivators have dispersed is a country in which the pastoral confederations grow relatively stronger, because their form of production is the one that still functions, and in which no administration can be built because there is no dense settled tax base to build it on.

That reading also closes a circle in this study. Nadir's floor was made of pastoral tribal cavalry hired rather than broken, and his own tribe had been planted in Khorasan by an earlier dynasty for frontier duty. His reign both drew on the pastoral sector and — through conscription, deportation and the flight it caused — enlarged it at the expense of the settled one. The instrument and the wreckage were the same social material.

One city, two centuries

The single clearest measurement available is Isfahan, and it should be set out as a series because the series is the argument.

In the seventeenth century, European estimates run from two hundred thousand (Herbert, 1627–29) to five hundred thousand (Olearius, 1637), with Chardin holding at the end of the century that it nearly equalled London — which would place it among the largest cities on earth, with Istanbul, Delhi, Beijing and Edo.

Krusinski, inside the city, reports that fewer than a hundred thousand souls were left when it was taken in October 1722.

By 1750 the figure has been put at perhaps twenty thousand.

By 1772, under Karim Khan's peace, it had recovered to something like forty to fifty thousand.

The first official census, in 1870, counted seventy-six thousand.

It did not count two hundred thousand again until the census of 1939–41.

Every one of those numbers is soft and the early ones are guesses by travellers, and none of this is attributable to Nadir alone — the siege preceded him and the civil wars followed him. But the series is not soft, because the direction and the duration are not in dispute. One of the great cities of the world fell to something on the order of a twentieth of its peak, and took roughly two hundred years to return to a level it had exceeded in 1637. That is what a step looks like when you plot it.

What the arrangement's ending cost

The user's frame includes the ending, and honesty requires it, because the largest part of the bill fell due after the man was dead.

The dissolution of 1747 opened not a succession but a half-century of civil war, and the killing in it exceeded anything Nadir did inside Iran. Adil Shah massacred Nadir's line at Kalat and was overthrown and executed within a year. Shahrokh was deposed, restored and blinded. New Julfa was pillaged repeatedly by successive claimants and the Julfan trading network that had reached from Amsterdam to Manila came apart, its families dispersing to the Mediterranean, Russia and South Asia — and when they were invited home in 1771 with promises of security and civil freedom they declined to come. Kerman was sacked by Afghans in 1747; and in 1794, when Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar finally ran his last Zand rival to ground there, the city was destroyed over ninety days and as many as thirty thousand of its inhabitants were massacred or blinded, the women and children sold. Shiraz lost around half its population to the same conqueror.

Karim Khan's twenty-odd years of peace from the early 1750s are the interval in which some of this was recovered — Isfahan doubling, Shiraz rebuilt, Qom reviving — and they are the measure of what an arrangement with a settled interior could do even in a wrecked country. They are also the exception in a period of five decades.

So the accounting of this arrangement's ending is not a line under Nadir's reign. It is the fifty years in which nobody could establish an order, because — as this study has traced — he had destroyed or dispersed every class from which one could have been built, and left a warrant nobody could hold and a treasury behind a guard.

The forgetting, and the form it took

The framework's expectation is that if enough time passes the violence disappears into "the way the world is," and the arrangement's origin in force is simply forgotten by the people living inside it.

That is not what happened here, and the reason is structural: the arrangement did not last long enough to become anyone's furniture. Eleven years installs nothing, and the order was gone within months of its founder. There was no generation that grew up inside it and no children handed a world.

What happened instead was that the violence was **managed** — and the managing turned out to be more durable than forgetting. The instrument was the one identified earlier in this study: the dividing line drawn by Nadir's own secretary, which places the deliverance of Iran on one side and the destruction of it on the other, with the crossing at the Caucasus expedition of 1741–42, and which relocates everything after the line from the domain of policy into the domain of madness. It conceals no facts. It supplies a diagnosis.

And it has held for two hundred and fifty years. Malcolm ascribed the last years to creeping insanity, and Malcolm reached Persian readers through the Bombay translation of 1873. Eqbal Ashtiyani in the 1930s described a ruler who served his country well until India, when cruelty and greed overtook him. Iranian school textbooks today present the warrior who drove out the foreign usurpers, with the Indian bloodshed as an aberration. A mausoleum was built for him at Mashhad in the middle of the twentieth century, on a site from which an earlier dynasty had dug up his bones and reburied them so a shah could tread on them.

So the accounting closes with an observation about accountings. The violence of this arrangement was never naturalised, because there was no time. It was **partitioned** — and a partition is a more robust instrument than amnesia, because amnesia is destroyed by the discovery of a document, whereas a partition can absorb every document you show it. Each new atrocity confirmed rather than damaged the account, because the account had already conceded that the last years were terrible and had explained why.

Reading the accounting against the framework

Three things, one of them a genuine addition.

First, the addition: the metabolic note can be called as a step rather than a spike, and the step is the harder case. The framework's existing treatment anticipates the debt being paid in famine and disease — a mortality event following the disruption of coordination, dateable, countable, and followed by recovery. Afsharid Iran shows the other form. Where the elevated carrying capacity rests on **infrastructure maintained by the cultivating population itself**, the removal of that population *is* the destruction of the infrastructure, and the result is not a mortality spike but a permanent downward step in what the land will support. The qanat is the paradigm case, but the mechanism

is general to any labour-maintained system — terraces, dykes, drained polders, tank irrigation, managed forest.

Three properties make this form especially worth flagging. It can be produced entirely by policies that contain no destruction at all: conscription, deportation and a tax rate that drives cultivators off the land will empty a valley as thoroughly as an army would, and the works fall in by themselves. It is **not self-repairing**, because rebuilding a qanat is a capital project requiring specialists and years, so the return of the population does not restore the ceiling — which is why the deportees of Karabakh could walk home in 1748 and the country still not recover for a century. And it is nearly invisible in the record, since there is no event to date and no body count, which means it will be systematically under-attributed by any accounting that looks for casualties.

Second, the diagnostic that follows. Where a metabolic step is suspected but no famine is recorded, look for **the reversion of land use** — settled agriculture giving way to pastoralism, orchard to grazing, irrigated to dry-farmed — and for its political shadow, which is the strengthening of the tribal or pastoral sector relative to the settled one. In eighteenth-century Iran those two show up together and the historiography has separate names for them: the underrealisation of agricultural potential through the survival of pastoral nomadism, and the tribal resurgence and decline of the bureaucracy. They are one event described by an economic historian and a political one. Where the corpus finds a "tribal resurgence" in a period following heavy conscription or forced migration, it should ask what happened to the irrigation.

Third, a specification on forgetting. The card expects the violence that founded an order to fade into the furniture of reality given enough time, which is what makes an order cheap. That mechanism requires duration, and duration is exactly what an unsettled order does not get. So the corpus should carry the alternative: **where an order is too short-lived for its violence to be naturalised, the violence is instead partitioned** — divided by a chronicler into a legitimate phase and a pathological one — and the partition outperforms forgetting, because it survives the evidence. Amnesia is refutable by a document; a diagnosis absorbs documents. This is why the reception of Nadir is so much more favourable than the reception of rulers who killed fewer people over longer periods: not because the facts were hidden, but because a usable shape for them was supplied early by the only man who wrote the whole thing down.

And a closing refusal, which this module owes the material. It would be false to end on a ledger implying that the reign was simply a subtraction. Nadir found a country partitioned by two empires with its capital held by a foreign garrison, and he reassembled it; the Afghans went, the Ottomans went back to the 1639 line, the

Russians withdrew by treaty, and for a decade there was one authority between the Oxus and the Gulf. That is not nothing and the study has credited it throughout. What the accounting shows is what it was bought with — a payroll larger than the country's whole revenue, met first from a sacked foreign capital and then from the cultivators until they left, so that the reassembly of Iran was funded by the dismantling of it. Legibility is not pardon, and neither is admiration. The arithmetic is simply that the instrument which restored the country's borders consumed the country inside them, and that the note for it was still being paid, in silted channels and empty villages, by people who had never heard the man's name.

A note on sources

The figures in the sword column are given as ranges and their provenance is stated in the modules where each is established, and this module does not aggregate them into a total, because the record will not support one. The Delhi massacre of 22 March 1739 is given at twenty to thirty thousand killed in a day, with higher figures in some accounts and no reliable count; the enslavement figure of about ten thousand women and children comes from a Dutch East India Company representative in the city. Karnal casualties, the Daghestan losses and the contested Andalal tradition, the sack of Shiraz in June 1744, and the towers of heads are documented in the earlier modules. The quotation describing the destruction of whole cities and the flight of subjects into the mountains and deserts is from the official history in the public-domain English abridgement published by William Jones as *The History of the Life of Nader Shah* (London, 1773), and is quoted here because it is the friendly witness testifying against its own subject. Adil Shah's accession decree and Hanway's sceptical footnote on the reported thirty thousand blinded are from Jonas Hanway, *An Historical Account of the British Trade over the Caspian Sea* (London, 1753), vol. II, as is the phrase that supplies this module's title, describing a country "already drained, not of money only, but of almost every thing necessary to the support of life"; the decree is the incoming regime's justification for a coup and is read as such.

The metabolic argument rests on the following. The mechanism of *qanat* irrigation and its dependence on continuous specialist maintenance is standard and uncontroversial. The specific finding that the disruption of Iranian economic life in this period was accentuated by "the strains that were placed on the country's irrigation system when there occurred a reduction in the cultivating population of certain areas (through forcible conscription or flight into other areas)" is Gavin Hambly's, cited with Ervand Abrahamian and Charles Issawi in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* article on the economy in the Qajar period, which is also the source for the observation that foreign

observers widely concurred that the population had declined below its Safavid level, for the reports of deserted villages and abandoned agricultural land including in fertile areas, for the underrealisation of agricultural potential arising from the survival of pastoral nomadism, and for John Malcolm's estimate of about six million for the early 1800s with half the population nomadic. Ann Lambton's "The Tribal Resurgence and the Decline of the Bureaucracy in the Eighteenth Century" (in Naff and Owen, eds., *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Islamic History*, 1977) is the authority for the political side of the same phenomenon. The Cambridge History of Iran's treatment of the long-term consequences of irrigation destruction for Iranian agriculture, made there in respect of the Mongol invasions, supplies the general form of the argument, which is applied here to a different period on the strength of Hambly's specific finding; the extension is this study's own and is offered as a reading rather than as established scholarship.

The Isfahan population series is from the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* articles on Isfahan's population and on the Safavid period — Herbert's 200,000 in 1627–29, Olearius's 500,000 in 1637, Chardin's comparison with London, the range of 60,000 to 300,000 across Qajar estimates, the official census of 76,000 in 1870, and the count of 204,000 in 1939–41 — together with the figure of perhaps 20,000 by 1750 rising to 40,000–50,000 by 1772 that appears in the literature on the Zand period following John Perry. Krusinski's report that fewer than a hundred thousand souls remained when Isfahan was taken in 1722 is from *The History of the Late Revolutions of Persia* (London, 1733), vol. II. All early modern population figures for Iranian cities are travellers' estimates and are treated as such; the series is used for its direction and duration rather than for any individual value.

The material on the ending — the pillaging of New Julfa, the dispersal of the Julfan network and the refusal of the Basra merchants to return in 1771; the sack of Kerman by Afghans in 1747 and its destruction by Agha Mohammad Khan in 1794 with as many as thirty thousand inhabitants massacred or blinded; the losses at Shiraz; and the recovery under Karim Khan — follows the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* articles on Julfa in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and on Kerman in the Afsharid and Zand period, together with Sebouh Aslanian's work on the Julfan network and John Perry's on Karim Khan. The reception history, including Malcolm's ascription of the last years to insanity, the Bombay translation of 1873, Eqbal Ashtiyani's account of the 1930s, and the treatment in current Iranian textbooks, follows Rudi Matthee's "The wrath of God or national hero? Nader Shah in European and Iranian historiography" (*JRAS*, 2023), as set out at greater length in the module on information and suppression.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited, not quoted at length. Where the record will not bear a number this module says so rather than supplying one, and no quotation, date, attribution or figure has been reconstructed from memory.

NINE DAYS OF SILENCE

Module 12 · Convergence and Divergence — the control case that was standing in the next tent; three answers to one problem in one country in one century; and the strongest case for Nadir Shah, stated fully and answered

The control case

The difficulty with a study like this one is that a single case cannot show whether the outcome followed from the structure or from the century. Perhaps eighteenth-century Iran was simply ungovernable; perhaps no man in that position could have built anything; perhaps the material defeated the builder.

This case is unusually protected against that objection, because the control was standing in the same camp on the same night.

Ahmad Khan Abdali commanded Nadir's Afghan contingent. He had been in that army since 1738, had learned his trade in it, had risen to the top of it, and on the night of 19–20 June 1747 he was posted at the perimeter of the camp at Fathabad while a group of Afshar and Qajar officers walked past the sentries and killed the shah in his tent. He reached the tent, found the body, and — by the tradition his own successors preserved — wept. Then he took the Afghan troops and a portion of the treasure and rode east to Kandahar.

Within months he had been elected paramount ruler by an assembly of Pashtun chiefs, taken the title *Durr-i-Durran*, Pearl of Pearls, and begun building a state. That state expanded to run from eastern Iran to Kashmir and from the Oxus to the Arabian Sea, larger at its height than the contemporary Mughal empire. He died in his bed in 1772 after twenty-five years, and **was succeeded by his son.** The dynasty he founded held until the 1820s, and the tribal confederation he named ruled Afghanistan into the twentieth century.

Same year. Same army. Same training. Same trade. Same problem — a soldier of no royal blood trying to convert possession into ownership in a wrecked region between collapsing empires. One arrangement lasted eleven years and disintegrated in months. The other lasted a quarter-century and passed to an heir.

So the material was not the explanation. Something else was.

What the other man did

Run the same audit that this study ran on Nadir, and the differences are not subtle. They are, item by item, the inverse.

On the warrant. Nadir convened an assembly, put himself against a four-year-old Safavid, and had the head of the Shi'i religious establishment strangled for observing that everyone was for the Safavid dynasty. Ahmad Shah submitted himself to a *loya jirga* — a tribal council with its own long-standing authority, which he did not create and did not control — and was chosen by it. The sanction came from a religious figure, Sabir Shah, who emerged and told the assembly he could find nobody more worthy. And Ahmad Shah had something Nadir did not: he was a Sadozai, a direct descendant of Sado, of the most prominent lineage in the confederation. He had a lineage *and* he had an institution, and he used both.

On the settlement. Nadir surveyed the endowments, confiscated them into the *raqabat-e Naderi*, suspended the framework of pious foundations, and moved to pay soldiers and officials fixed cash salaries in place of revenues from land tenure. Ahmad Shah left the Durrani khans as semi-independent holders of real provincial power, mobilising their own cavalry, advising through a formal council of *sardars* drawn from the elite subtribes, and meeting in recurring jirgas to resolve disputes and endorse succession. The Indian revenues that flowed to his treasury at Kandahar funded, among other things, **tribal subsidies**. He bought a coordinating class and kept buying it.

On the treasure. Nadir's Indian plunder went to Kalat, behind a guard of his best troops, and was still there, largely untouched, while his collectors were driving villagers into the mountains. Ahmad Shah's Indian revenues went out, into subsidies and into the hands of the men whose loyalty he required.

On the succession. Nadir made his eldest son governor of Khorasan at seventeen and regent of Iran during the Indian campaign — and then blinded him in 1742 on the word of a would-be assassin, and died five years later with no heir who could see. Ahmad Shah was succeeded by Timur Shah.

Every one of those is a decision, and every one of them runs the opposite way.

Nine days

But the single sharpest difference is a detail of manner, and it says more than the institutional list does.

At Mughan in February 1736, Nadir assembled the notables, encamped his army around them, asked them to choose between himself and a Safavid infant, had the one

man who answered honestly arrested and strangled, and required everyone present to sign a document indicating agreement. It took several days and the outcome was not at any point in doubt.

At Kandahar in the autumn of 1747, the chiefs of the Durrani tribes met to choose a leader, and the discussions ran for **nine days** among rival candidates. Ahmad Khan, younger than several of the others, did not campaign for himself. He kept silent. At the end of it a religious figure came out and named him, and the leaders agreed.

The difference between those two scenes is the whole of this study compressed into a week and a half. Nadir staged a procedure and controlled its outcome, and therefore got nothing from it, because a procedure whose result you control confers no authority you did not already have — everyone in the tent knew who had the army, and the signatures they gave were worth precisely what the signatories' lives were worth if they refused. Ahmad Shah submitted to a procedure he did *not* control, at real risk of losing, and therefore got something out of it that no amount of force could have produced: a title conferred by a body other than himself.

That is how a man without a warrant acquires one, and it is the only way. You cannot mint legitimacy, as this study has argued from the beginning; you can only borrow it from an audience that already honours something. Which means the price of acquiring it is always the same — you must accept a real chance of not getting it. An assembly that cannot say no cannot say yes either. Nadir was never, at any point in twenty-one years, willing to submit himself to an outcome he did not control, and that unwillingness is not a character flaw appended to his political problem. It *was* his political problem, in its final and most exact form.

Three answers, one country, one century

Iran itself supplies two further tests, because the same problem was attempted twice more within fifty years by men who had watched him.

Karim Khan Zand — a Lak whom Nadir had deported from the Zagros to Khorasan to serve in his army, and who led his people home after the assassination — took Isfahan in 1750, installed a seventeen-year-old Safavid as Ismail III, and then ruled for close to three decades **without ever taking the title of shah**, styling himself *vakil*, deputy, and reinterpreting the word as deputy of the subjects. He rented the warrant rather than forging one, and it worked: he gave Iran its one interval of decent government in the century, rebuilt Shiraz, and doubled Isfahan's population from its 1750 nadir. And then he died in 1779 and his house was destroyed within fifteen years, because renting is not owning, and he had built no more of a settlement than Nadir

had. Renting outperforms forging by a factor of about three, and it still does not produce a default.

Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar is the one who solved it, and how he solved it closes the argument. He staged his own coronation on the Mughan plain — the deliberate echo is unmistakable — and then did the precise opposite of Nadir on the two decisive variables. He built on a tribal base, the Qajars, who had a stake in his house. And he restored rather than expropriated the interpreter class, asserting Shi'i credentials, repudiating Nadir explicitly for having deviated from the Shi'i foundations the Qajars were invoking, destroying his tomb at Mashhad and having the bones reburied. The dynasty he founded lasted from the 1790s to 1925.

So: forge a warrant and expropriate the clergy — eleven years. Rent a warrant and expropriate nobody, but settle nobody either — thirty years. Restore the old warrant, endow the interpreter class, and build on a tribe with a stake — a hundred and thirty years. One country, one century, one problem, three answers, and the durations line up in exactly the order the framework predicts.

Convergence: the warlord's dilemma, a third instance

This corpus has examined two other men who came out of a long collapse and tried to convert battlefield victory into durable order, and Nadir belongs beside them.

Diocletian and Tokugawa Ieyasu faced structurally identical conditions and produced structurally similar solutions — a new legitimating framework, comprehensive legal codes, administrative reorganisation to balance central control against regional autonomy — and the divergence in their outcomes turned on whether the ideological framework could be **appropriated from existing cultural capital or had to be constructed from raw materials**. Ieyasu appropriated: Neo-Confucian doctrine, the emperor's sanction, the existing warrior order reordered rather than replaced. Diocletian constructed, and his Tetrarchy collapsed within two years of his abdication; the Roman case needed a second act, and Constantine supplied it not by perfecting the construction but by abandoning it in favour of appropriating Christianity — an existing belief system with institutional infrastructure that Diocletian had tried to destroy.

Nadir is the third instance and he falls on the constructive side, harder than Diocletian did. He attempted to build a legitimating framework from raw materials — a reclassified *madhhab*, a Turkmen peer-group, a Timurid conjunction — while simultaneously destroying the institutional infrastructure of the belief system he might have appropriated. And Iran's second act, when it came, was Constantine's move: Agha

Mohammad Khan appropriated the Shi'i establishment that the Safavids had built and Nadir had tried to demolish.

There is a smaller convergence in that comparison that is worth stating because it is so exact. Both Diocletian and Ieyasu, in the most revealing gesture either made, **voluntarily abdicated** — deliberately stepping down to demonstrate that succession could function independently of their persons. Nadir's corresponding act was to blind his heir. Three post-crisis stabilisers, and the two who tried to prove the office could outlive the man produced orders that lasted two years and two hundred and fifty years respectively; the one who proved it could not produced an order that lasted eleven.

Convergence: what Mamluk Egypt shows is not heritability

The corpus's Mamluk study supplies the strongest possible check on this study's central claim, and it is worth stating as an objection before it is used as support.

The Mamluk sultanate ran for two hundred and sixty-seven years on a coercive elite of purchased slave-soldiers whose positions were emphatically **not heritable** — sons were excluded from the mamluk class by design, and the sultanate itself passed by force and faction rather than by blood far more often than not. If durability required heritable grants, the Mamluks should have dissolved in a generation. They did not.

The resolution is the distinction this study drew from the Roman Republic in auditing the elite, and Egypt confirms it from the other side. What a mamluk held was non-heritable and nonetheless **institutional**: a household with a name that outlasted its founder, an *iqta* assignment within a known system of assignments, a defined path from purchase through training to command, and above all a machine of recruitment and promotion that everybody expected to be running next year and the year after. He could not pass his position to his son. He could be entirely confident that the *system of positions* would survive him, which meant that his interest in the system was separable from his interest in his current standing — and that separable interest is the default. There was also a caliph in Cairo, kept for exactly the purpose of supplying a warrant nobody had to forge.

Nadir had neither. His officers held no institution and no expectation that any system of positions would outlast him, because there was no system: there was a man, and degrees of his favour. So the corpus's rule should be stated in the form Egypt and Rome jointly support and Iran tests to destruction: **what a settlement requires is not that positions be heritable but that they be institutional — that they exist independently of the person who confers them.** Heritability is one way of achieving that and the commonest. It is not the variable.

Divergence: what this case has that the others do not

Three things make Afsharid Iran unlike anything else in this collection, and they are why it earns its place.

It is the corpus's cleanest natural experiment on legitimacy, because the recogniser was a single identifiable party with a documented, dated series of refusals. Most orders' legitimacy is diffuse — an audience of millions, no minutes kept, no way to say when it succeeded or failed. Nadir's central claim required the assent of one man in Istanbul, and we have the demands of 1736, the refusal, the embassy of 1741, the *shaykh al-Islam*'s *fatwa* declaring the *madhhab* heretical, the council at Najaf in 1743 with its signed and worthless document, the abandonment of the demand at Kordan in 1746, and the sultan's embassy of gifts arriving in the spring of 1747 to find him dead. Eleven years of a legitimacy transaction, dated at every step. Nothing else in the collection is this legible.

It is the corpus's control on the necessity of a settlement, because it is the only case where the absence is a documented policy rather than an omission. Elsewhere the analyst must infer from silence whether a ruler failed to distribute or merely failed to leave records. Here there is a cadastral survey, a confiscation, a suspension of the endowment framework, and a stated preference for fixed salaries over land tenure. He did not neglect to build a settlement. He dismantled the instruments for building one, deliberately, having first counted them.

And it is the corpus's demonstration that the crack in the floor determines the shape of what follows. Elsewhere, elite fracture produces a revolution — a contest for an apparatus, won by somebody, with a recognisable order coming out the far side. Here fracture produced dissolution, because the men who fractured the apex were saving their lives rather than defending holdings, and had nothing to install because they had never had anything to hold.

The counter-position, stated fully

Now the strongest case against everything above, and it deserves to be put at full strength rather than set up to be knocked down.

He inherited a catastrophe and he reversed it. In 1726 Iran had no state. Isfahan was held by a few thousand Afghans; the Caspian provinces were Russian by treaty; the whole west and the Caucasus were Ottoman, ceded in a document the two powers were candid enough to call the Partition of Persia; Herat was Abdali; Khorasan belonged to a warlord who had minted coin from the silver of the Imam's shrine. Two empires had agreed to divide the country and had written down what each would take.

Within a decade Nadir had expelled the Afghans, driven the Ottomans back to the 1639 line, obtained Russian withdrawal by treaty without fighting for it, and reassembled a single authority from the Oxus to the Gulf. Iran exists as a state today in a shape he had a great deal to do with preserving. That is not a small thing and it was not inevitable.

He was never beaten. Not by the Ghilzai who had destroyed the Safavid empire, not by the Ottomans in four campaigns, not by the Mughals, not by the Uzbeks. The instrument he built was in advance of anything his opponents could field, and he built it himself out of a herdsman's education.

And — the serious version of the objection — the comparison with Ahmad Shah is unfair, because Ahmad Shah had materials that Nadir did not. He was a Sadozai of the leading lineage of his confederation; Nadir was a Qirqlu Afshar of no distinction whatever, whose own official historian had to write that his birth was neither eminently high nor contemptibly low. Ahmad Shah had a *loya jirga*, a functioning institution with independent authority that could confer a title; Iran's equivalent institution was a bloodline Nadir could not enter by any means. Ahmad Shah's Pashtun confederation was a coherent political nation of a few hundred thousand; Nadir's realm was a vast, multi-ethnic, multi-confessional empire whose core population regarded him as a usurper on doctrinal grounds. On this reading the difference in outcomes is a difference in inheritance, and to fault Nadir for not making a settlement is to fault him for not possessing a warrant — which is precisely what the study concedes he could not have obtained.

The answer

The counter-position is half right, and the half that is right is this study's own thesis rather than an objection to it.

Yes: his position foreclosed the cheap routes. The Safavid warrant was vested in a bloodline, which cannot be inherited by a stranger or redirected by capturing an institution, so inheriting and redirecting were closed by definition and only forging remained. Yes: a grant made on his authority would have been priced at his life expectancy, so refusing to distribute was rational rather than stupid. Yes: he was working with worse material than Ahmad Shah in every respect the objection names. The study has argued all of that at length and does not retreat from any of it. The position lights the logic.

But the person chooses, and three things in the record show that the logic was not compulsion.

He built a durable position once, and it worked exactly as the framework predicts. The Georgian crowns of 1744 were conferred on men with armed followings who had delivered a province, and they were lodged not in Nadir's goodwill but in a Bagratid kingship confirmed by the Georgian church in its own cathedral by its own rite. That grant survived him completely. He was therefore not incapable of conveying a position anchored outside himself; he did it, saw it work, and did not repeat it — because what made it durable was exactly what made it uncontrollable, and he preferred control.

He reversed the confiscation in his last year, which means he could see it. The decree resuming the pious foundations in 1746–47 was avoidable, costly, and made by a man whom nobody could compel. It is the revealed-preference test returning a verdict in his own hand: the thing he had dispensed with was not dispensable, and he had worked that out. Ten years too late, and against the objection that he never understood the problem.

And the nine days. This is where the counter-position finally fails, because the *loya jirga* was not simply handed to Ahmad Shah. He was younger than several rivals, he did not campaign, and the outcome was genuinely open for nine days. What he did that Nadir never did in twenty-one years was **submit himself to a procedure whose result he could not control** — and that is not a resource anyone inherits. It is an act, available to any man with an army, costing exactly one thing: the risk of losing. Nadir had an assembly available to him at Mughan and he made it an acclamation, and he made it an acclamation because he was not prepared to risk the answer.

So the honest verdict is not that he failed at something impossible. It is that his position made a particular preference overwhelmingly attractive — **the preference for control over durability** — and that he indulged it at every juncture where the two came apart, including several where the cost of the other choice would have been small. A ruler who cannot bear to create a man capable of surviving his displeasure cannot create a man who will defend his order. That is a structural statement, and it is also, in the end, a statement about a choice made repeatedly by a specific person over twenty-one years.

And the achievement stands beside it without cancelling it or being cancelled. He reassembled Iran and he consumed it doing so; the payroll that expelled the Afghans was larger than the country's whole revenue, and was met first from the sack of Delhi and then from the cultivators until they walked away and the qanats fell in. Both halves are true. Legibility is not pardon, and neither is admiration for the machine.

Reading the whole against the framework

This study's contribution is a single distinction with consequences, and it is worth setting down in the form the corpus should carry it.

Possession is not ownership. A man who holds ground can take what is on it and give what is on it away, but he cannot make the giving stick, because what he hands over is worth only as long as his continuing ability to hold the ground it sits on, and every receiver knows this and prices it accordingly. What he issues is a licence, revocable by his death, and a licence manufactures no defenders. Ownership is the power to convey a thing that stays conveyed, and it requires a **warrant** — a source of title standing outside the granter's own arm, which the receiver already honours. That is what a settlement is made of, and a settlement is what produces a default.

From that one distinction, this case has traced six consequences that are not six variables but one variable observed six times. An apex without a warrant **cannot bind his elite**, because his grants are priced at his life expectancy and would create independent rivals rather than defenders. He **cannot install a belief**, because formation requires an endowed institution that outlives him, and endowing one means making owners. He **cannot be checked**, because a protection lodged in his own goodwill is a licence that decays and must be re-bought, as the merchants of Agulis found. He **cannot tune his extraction**, because the mechanism that restrains a rate is a class holding claims on future output, and he has not created one. He **cannot re-balance his own coalition**, because where positions are favours rather than offices, any reallocation is a death sentence to the losing side. And he **cannot be succeeded**, because there is nothing to succeed to.

The framework's question — *is there a seat in it, and can a stranger sit down?* — should therefore be asked in two parts, since the two come apart and this case pulls them apart in the harder direction. Is there an **instrument**, an apparatus a newcomer can capture and operate? And is there a **warrant**, a source of title the population already honours? Iran in 1726 had lost the first and kept the second, which is worse than losing both, because it offers a cheap non-solution: rent it. Nadir rented for ten years as *slave of Tahmasp*, and rent is not title, and a tenant cannot convey.

And where the warrant is vested in a **bloodline**, all the cheap routes close at once. It cannot be inherited by a stranger, because a stranger has not the blood; it cannot be redirected by capturing an institution, because the institution is a family. Only forging is left — and forging is not merely expensive, as the card has it, but structurally impossible where the party who would have to honour the new currency is a rival sovereign whose own legitimacy consists in refusing it. There is no army that can take a pillar in the Ka'ba, because the pillar's whole value is that it was conceded.

Which leaves the last question, and it is the one the nine days answer. If a currency of legitimacy can only be borrowed and never minted, how does a man who has none ever acquire one? Not by force, which cannot compel recognition; not by argument, which can be declined; and not by staging his own election, which confers nothing because everybody can see who arranged it. He acquires it the way Ahmad Shah did — by placing himself before a body whose authority he did not create, and accepting a real chance that it will choose somebody else. **The price of a warrant is the risk of not receiving it**, and that price is payable by anyone, including a herdsman's son with the best army in Asia.

He would not pay it, and so he owned nothing, and so nobody defended him, and on a June night fifteen men who held nothing but their stations walked past his sentries and took back the only thing he had ever really possessed.

A note on sources

The comparison with Ahmad Shah Durrani rests on the standard accounts: his service as commander of the Afghan contingent under Nadir from 1738, his departure from the camp at Fathabad with a portion of the treasure, his election at a *loya jirga* of Durrani chiefs near Kandahar in 1747 after nine days of discussion during which he did not campaign for himself, the intervention of Sabir Shah, his Sadozai descent from Sado, his coronation with coins struck in his name, the title *Durr-i-Durran*, the extent of the empire at its height, his death in 1772 and the succession of Timur Shah, and the persistence of the Durrani dynasty into the 1820s. The governing structure — khans holding provinces semi-independently and mobilising their own cavalry, a formal council of *sardars* drawn from the elite Durrani subtribes advising on military, diplomatic and revenue matters, recurring jirgas to resolve disputes and endorse succession, and Indian revenues directed to Kandahar to fund military operations and tribal subsidies — follows the modern surveys of the Durrani state, including Christine Noelle-Karimi's work; Afghan nationalist historiography's treatment of Ahmad Shah as founder of the modern state is noted in that literature as an interpretive frame and is not adopted here.

The comparison with Diocletian and Tokugawa Ieyasu draws on this collection's own study of post-crisis stabilisation, including its finding that the divergence between the two turned on whether the legitimating framework could be appropriated from existing cultural capital or had to be constructed from raw materials, and its observation that both men voluntarily abdicated to demonstrate that institutional succession could operate independently of personal authority. The Mamluk comparison draws on this collection's study of Mamluk Egypt.

The Iranian comparative material follows John Perry's work as summarised in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* articles on the Zand dynasty and on Karim Khan Zand — Karim Khan's origin as a Lak deported by Nadir to Khorasan, the installation of Abu Torab as Ismail III on 29 June 1750, his lifelong refusal of the title of shah and his adoption of *vakil al-ra'aya*, the recovery of Isfahan and the rebuilding of Shiraz under his rule, and the destruction of the Zand house within fifteen years of his death in 1779 — and Rudi Matthee's "The wrath of God or national hero? Nader Shah in European and Iranian historiography" (*JRAS*, 2023) for Agha Mohammad Khan's coronation on the Mughan plain, his explicit repudiation of Nadir for deviating from Shi'i foundations, and the destruction of Nadir's sepulchre at Mashhad with the subsequent reburials.

All material concerning Nadir's own reign — the Mughan assembly of February 1736 and the strangling of the *mullabashi*; the five conditions of 1736 and the Ottoman refusals through to the treaty of Kordan in 1746 and the embassy of spring 1747; the cadastral survey, the *raqabat-e Naderi*, the suspension and last-year resumption of the pious foundations, and the substitution of fixed salaries for land tenure; the Georgian grants of 1744 and the coronation at Svetitskhoveli on 1 October 1745; the blinding of Reza Qoli in 1742; the treasure at Kalat; and the assassination at Fathabad on 19–20 June 1747 — is established with its sources in the preceding modules of this study and is not re-sourced here. Where a claim in this module depends on a single interested witness or on a contested tradition, that is stated at the point of use in the module where the evidence is set out.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited, not quoted at length. No quotation, date, attribution or figure has been reconstructed from memory. The counter-position in this module is stated in the strongest form the evidence will support before it is answered, and the answer concedes what the evidence requires: that Nadir's position was materially worse than Ahmad Shah's in every respect the objection names, and that the choices which followed from it were nonetheless choices.